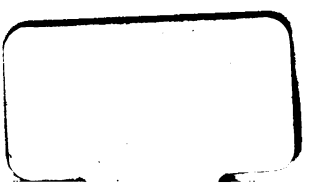

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Pallen

Epochs of Literature

BY

CONDÉ B. PALLEN, Ph. D., LL. D.

AUTHOR OF

"THE PHILOSOPHY OF LITERATURE,"

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PREFACE.

I make no attempt in the following pages to set forth a history of literature. I have, on the contrary, eschewed any approach to a historical setting of these brief studies. Histories of literature are plentiful—good, bad and indifferent—and I have no desire to multiply superfluities. My purpose is to give in large outline the spirit of the literature of the Western world, to trace its *motif* in its various phases and developments. The prospects I wish to point out are bird's-eye views, not detailed researches into data, biographies and chronologies. A fair acquaintance with the history of literature is presumed in the reader, as also some understanding of the philosophical principles underlying the manifestations of mankind's literary activities. I have treated these abstract principles in a preceding volume under the title: "The Philosophy

of Literature." The present studies are designed to be supplementary to "The Philosophy," by way of concrete application and illustration.

As there is much danger of misapprehension from my method, I take precaution to forestall the trouble. The judgments given in the studies here presented are categorical; they are rendered with a view to the entire perspective under reach of the eye. We stand upon a central summit, from whose point of survey the literary landscape of the Western world lies in its farthest and widest and largest prospect. From this height the regions under ken take the proportions of the whole. The experience of such a general survey saves us from the mistakes of an exaggerated perspective in particular regions, which is a not uncommon danger with those who traverse the fields of literature under the disadvantage of having no point of pre-eminence whence to orient their own position and to discover the just proportions of plain and valley, hill and mountain, in the wide sweep of the whole. When, therefore, we stand upon some elevation in a particular locality,

we will have learned that this is not necessarily the loftiest peak in the wide tract of human time, though from that point no loftier may then be visible; or when we thread our way through certain valleys or deserts, we will have learned to remember that the soil may be more abundant or more barren in other regions. In this wise we establish two necessary points of the literary compass. We enjoy an eminence whence we may safely make our own observations and at the same time learn to appreciate the value of true perspective. This establishment of the compass will teach us to avoid unworthy exaltation of what is only relatively high or undue depreciation of what is only relatively low, while we measure the heights and sound the depths by the law of that ideal, which encompasses the whole and defines the parts.

Keeping the altitude of this point of view in mind, the reader will more readily appreciate the absolute estimates of the various regions and epochs brought under his eye. He will the more readily understand how flat and low the perspective of Roman literature lies against the lofty elevation of Greek genius on

the one hand and against the sublime heights of Christian thought and art on the other. At the same time he should not allow himself to fall into the counter-notion that a literature, such as the Roman, which falls far short of the greatest and the loftiest, is therefore of no merit and value. The plain and the valley possess their peculiar and lesser beauties in a narrower and more restricted range, though indeed not the wide vision, the noble prospect and the sublime elevation of the mountain heights.

CONDÉ B. PALLEN.

ST. LOUIS, May, 1898.

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HOMER AND GREECE.

The Homeric poems are the fountain-head of Greek literature, and, inasmuch as Greek literature was the beginning of the first elaborated expression of the Western mind in the written word, they may be entitled to the same distinction in European literature. Not only, however, are they the source of the literature of the Western world, but they hold the unique place of bridging the chasm between the Oriental and the Occidental expression of the written word, spanning the dividing stream between Asiatic and European life.

Asia Minor was the highway of the peoples migrating westward from the cradle-lands of the race, from the regions just south of the Hindoo Koosh mountains. The expansion was gradual, until it at last overflowed the extreme western bounds of the Continent, and, passing over the narrow straits between, settled the rich regions beyond with peoples growing up under novel

conditions, forgetful of the ancient home and its largely contemplative existence. The farther westward they moved from the original seats of their primal life, the dimmer grew its memories, until they altogether melted away into the twilight of fable.

But as we go upward against the tide of emigration, backwards towards the regions of the ancestral sources, the nearer we approach the primal home, the profounder do we find the original gloom of the ancient loss shadowed in the life of the peoples strung out along the channels of advance westward. In European Greece, that Oriental darkness seems to have been dispersed by brighter suns in a land of various beauty, or at least to have been thrust into a background of mythus that caught the rainbowed glories of a rejuvenated imagination against the thinning clouds of a slowly fading tradition, until the old mists and glooms assumed the shapes of graceful legends picturing rather the lively phantasmata of the humanized fancy of the Western world than embodying the sombre shadows of the stricken spirit of the Orient.

In the time of Troy, Asia Minor was still Oriental; the sense of the ancient loss still cast its shadow on the souls of its people; they were still near enough in time and space to the region of man's birthplace to feel the chill of the desolation of his fall, blowing like an evil wind from the ruins of the paradisial world. Troy was in spirit an Oriental city; its sympathies were with the Orient.* But European Greece had in memory entirely severed the ancestral bond that once held it to the old world; the passivity of the Eastern mind had been sloughed off under the influence of changed conditions. The old tradition was transmuted into a vivid mythus, taking human contour and human proportions. From that aching spirit of contemplation, which had enswathed and petrified the Oriental mind, Greece had freed itself and had developed an active spirit of thought, which played in poetic freedom with the fabled images into which the ancient tradition had been quickened under the stimulus of new surroundings. The Greeks

*The Homeric description of the people and city of Troy shows a distinct Oriental type. Schliemann's discoveries reveal Trojan remains of an Eastern character.

no longer remembered that the fountain-head of their race lay in the distant land of the morning sun, and assumed the fable of having sprung from native soil; they were *Autocthones*, a race distinct and apart; the golden grasshopper of Athens was the emblem and the badge of their native birth. Hence the narrow seas that washed the neighboring shores of Greece and Asia Minor in the days of Troy had come to divide alien peoples, whose antipathetic spirits were inevitably destined to meet in deadly conflict. The restless activity of Greece was brought face to face with the long enduring patience of the Orient. The destiny of the Western world hung in the balance. The victory of the Orient meant the enslavement of Europe to the gloomy spirit of the tradition which remembered the loss of the pristine grace, but had forgotten the promise of deliverance. The victory of Greece meant the enfranchisement of the Occident from the spirit of perpetually impending woe, which had made the Orient a prison of sighs and a house of bondage. Providence, which guides the courses of nations in the fulfillment of its

larger designs towards that far off event in the secret counsels of God, had raised up a people moved by a spirit of active aggression to stem and dam the passive power of that despair which had so fatally seized upon humanity in the Orient. Such were the Greeks in the hands of eternal Wisdom, a self-concentrated people, preparing the way in the order of human activity for the fullness of time in the history of the sons of Adam.

The ten years' war on the plains of windy Troy was the scene of this momentous struggle between East and West. The Homeric poems are the record of that mighty event so pregnant with the history of the future. Whether the story of the siege of Troy be literally true or not is just now beyond my purpose to inquire and has no vital bearing on the present proposition. There may never have been an actual Troy; the rape of Helen may have been a mere fable, and the toilsome siege of Priam's city a figment of ancient legend. All this we may allow, accounting it the ready phantasy of the lively Greek imagination weaving idle pictures from the

dim wraith of ancient days. We may grant that the Iliad gives only the shadow of a substance, but what we must admit is that there would be no shadow if there were no substance to cast it upon the imagination. It may have been all a myth, but the myth takes its shape, like clouds around a mountain peak, about some lofty height in human history, and while it conceals, still reveals the outline of the eminence to which in ragged bulk it clings. We may, therefore, waive the literal truth of the Iliad, and still find in it substantial evidence of the drama of that fateful conflict which, at some period of Greek existence, was waged to mortal close between the aggressive virtue of the Hellenic peoples, wakened to an impetuous activity upon European soil, and the apathetic power of the Orient spreading sluggishly westward in an effluent stream to meet the refluent tide of a newly energized humanity, instinctively beating back and saving itself from that fatal flood of stagnant life creeping towards the Occidental world. The conflict was irrepressible; it must have found some scene of action and been decided in some sanguinary event. That

event may have been the ten years' siege of Priam's town and the occasion may have been the abduction of Helen. But whether the conflict actually took this form, or the event the special issue depicted in the Iliad, is a question substantially irrelevant to the body of the momentous truth shadowed there. The heart of the story is the history of some early struggle between the active virtue of the Occident and the passive power of the Orient in battle for the possession of European humanity. Providence placed victory in the hands of Greece, and prepared the way for the keen human activity which was to develope European men to the highest pitch of unassisted human excellence, in which were laid the foundations of that intellectual virtue destined to become the natural basis of the science of the supernatural Word in the ages of Christendom, and designed, we may also add, to demonstrate at the same time, as a lesson to after generations, the futility of unaided human reason in finding the supreme truth which works out the salvation of mankind.

Although we may consistently yield the

literal meaning of the Iliad and still preserve the accuracy of our proposition, still I see no reason why we should not accept it as an historical epic giving in faithful outline the story of an actual siege of Troy. The probability of the general truth of the Homeric account is greater than the probability of its fictitious character. It was plainly a national tradition fresh in the Greek mind in the times of Homer himself. There cannot be the slightest doubt that there had been a long and memorable conflict between Asia and Greece, in which the Greek states had united in a common cause and come out victorious. This much is a substantial and palpable central fact, whatever may have been the subsequent shaping of its outline. The event was too momentous and too far-reaching in the making of Greece not to have fixed itself upon the Greek mind with pertinacity and not to have been commemorated with the exultant exuberance of a victorious people, whose conquest had, for the first time, welded them into a nationality clearly sovereign in these middle regions of the earth. It was Greek tradition, and had be-

come in the mind of the native Greek substantial history. It took its narrative shape in poetic form, as did all tradition amongst new peoples in ancient times. Nor does its epic form in any way militate against its general veracity. Rather does its poetical dress confirm and seal its truth, for poetry has always preceded prose in the literature of early peoples as a primary and popular medium for the preservation of their traditions and their history. The poetic form fixed the tradition or event more picturesquely and, therefore, more vividly on the popular imagination, and so with greater accuracy preserved its truth both in substance and in form from the lapses of memory and the innovations of a peoples' subsequent literary development. The regularity of verse carrying with it the necessity of a crystallized form of expression not to be readily violated without offense to the ear, promises something of immunity from even verbal changes. The ease with which the cadence of verse falls into the memory and its musical persistence there, insures a facile endurance in the popular imagination and a

ready transmission to succeeding generations.

For nearly five hundred years were the Homeric poems thus transmitted and preserved amongst the tribes of Greece by word of mouth, and I believe, on the guarantee of their poetic form as well as by the importance of the tradition they enshrined, like a precious jewel in a consummate setting, with little or at least no vital variation from their original structure. Their musical exposition by strolling singers became a profession. The Rhapsodoi, the Trouvères of Greece, wandered from court to court chanting the deathless song of the siege of Troy, where Greece first realized her national unity and became the supreme power in the regions of the Mediterranean. It was the story of combined Greek might for the first time pitted under a single leadership against a common enemy, and of the unsubduable valor of Greek heroes from whose loins had sprung the great families of the race. The Iliad became the very Bible of the Hellenes, the one book giving the genesis of their national greatness and their victory over an alien

civilization, the noble song of the national triumph, the pæan of their supremacy over all other people as the sovereign race of mankind.

With the Iliad, as the very soul of its body, came the expression of a completed and perfected theological system, a religion essentially national and distinctively Greek, a hierarchy of deities the very image of Greek life, under whose divine tutelage the Greeks became the favored people of heaven. This Homeric image of a celestial hierarchy the embodied and crystallized conception of Hellenic theology, from the blind bard's time downward, became the popular idea of the divine hierarchy, the accepted picture of the manner and substance of the divine government of the world. It limned a distinctly complete pantheon, elaborated, rounded and correlated in all its details. In it we see how entirely the Greek mind had wandered away from the ancient Oriental notion of the divine; for the broad and peculiar characteristic of Homeric and Greek theology is its thorough humanization of divinity: it does not lift humanity up to the divine level, but

brings divinity down to human conditions. The Homeric gods were essentially anthropomorphic, magnified images of men ruling and governing the world under the impulse and conflict of the same passions and motives as actuated men in their daily intercourse. So intent was the Greek upon human affairs, so absorbed in the interests of mundane existence, that he compassed and emprisoned the divine within the narrow limitations of human living. Within the breasts of the gods rankled all the passions that beset humanity, the loves, the hates, the jealousies, the envies and the rivalries of mortals. Olympus was divided into adverse camps, as the gods respectively ranged themselves under the hostile banners of mortal combatants. The issue of the conflict before besieged Troy was determined by their valor and their mights rather than by prowess of mortal Greeks and Trojans. Olympus is as much concerned with the results of Priam's doom as the embattled hosts about the beleaguered city's wall, the conflict as momentous to the rivalries of the contending gods as to the human combatants whose opposing causes

they had diversely espoused. Apollo and Juno warred around about Troy as keenly and as eagerly as well-greaved Greeks or plumed Trojans, animated by the same spirit of rivalry and vengeance, as purely human in their motives and their passions as Achilles and Hector. This intermixture of the lives of gods and men, this humanized celestial hierarchy, ebullient with magnified passions and jealous strife, was a living reality in the Homeric imagination. That Venus and Mars were wounded in battle by mortal hands was as authentic as the deaths of Patroclus and Hector.

It was around about this humanized image of the Divine that Greek life developed. In Homer's time it was fully conceived and accepted as the traditional and completed expression of the Greek religion. Through the Iliad, as the bible of the race, it was handed down crystallized and intact to future generations, and like a great flood it inundated and spread over the entire regions of Hellenic existence.

While it is true that the foreground of the celestial regions was occupied by these

very humanized gods, playing their active part in man's daily life, there was in the Hellenic mind a distinct margent circumlocating the Olympic realm, an outer unknown abyss of destiny, whence issued an inexorable necessity before which even the gods bowed as submissively and as abjectly as men did. Under the inflexible domination of this view of the ultimate and unknowable ground of existence, nominated fate, there was no substantial difference between the immortal gods and mortal men, save that men were subject to the hand of death and the gods were not. The Greek mind was loath to contemplate fate, face to face. It sought to hide itself from that inflexible necessity at the back of the universe and so took refuge in the glittering pageant of the Olympian hierarchy. It knew not how to reconcile the inexorable edict of fate, either with human or with divine freedom. Rather than contemplate the fearful mystery, it turned from the harsh problem and gave itself up to the sunnier aspect of things irised in its own glowing imagination and reflected in the soft beauties of sapphired mountains, blue skies and amethyst seas,

where nature smiled and bloomed the live-long year. When by the constitution of human nature, for man must after some fashion conceive the ultimately divine and face its mystery, it turned to the contemplation of divine things, it transferred the glowing image of earthly life and made Olympus another Hellas, a transfigured picture of Greek life in the glowing splendors of immortality. Thus with the Greek, divinity became simply a greater humanity, freed from the worst calamities of man's existence. Though the insoluble mystery of fate overhung all in a circumambient darkness, the spaces of Olympus glowed with a transfused light of human happiness, whither men directed their laughing eyes, rather than look out upon that distant darkness, which could bring neither light nor comfort to their souls. Fate indeed played its part in human existence, but the better part was not to mention its dread name, or, if uttered at all, to speak it in softened terms, flowering it in an euphemism, rather than declaring its fearful presence. To thrust aside the one real problem of human living, to shove its one great mystery into the back-

ground of the unknowable, to lock up the reality of life in the brief span of time and the limits of the visible world, was the successful effort of the Hellenic mind up to the days of the Athenian supremacy. It lived a purely human life, untouched by external influences, in self simplicity. Its life was concerned only with itself, an intensely active life busy and absorbed with human affairs, accepting without question or doubt the ready picture of the Homeric universe, shaping itself in all its religious and human doings on the easy lines of mundane existence, with eyes avert from the next, or looking at the future life as a mere shadow of the departed substance of this.

So Greek life flowed along in its own peculiar and pellucid channels from Homer's day and from an unknown time prior to Homer no doubt, until the age of the Pisistratridæ, in the sixth century before Christ. The stream of its existence up to this time remained undisturbed, growing in volume and in strength, both deepening and widening indeed, but still intact and inclusively Greek. It met with no obstacle in its unmixed course,

remaining the pure and undiluted current of the Homeric fountain-head. Though the national life found no centralized rule, and the Hellenic peoples were divided up into many petty States, jealous and narrow, they were all animated by the same principle of national amity and breathed the same Homeric spirit which made the living soul of their union. Throughout all the Hellenic States were the Homeric poems chanted by strolling minstrels,* who wandered from one petty court to another, reciting to the accompaniment of music the great events of Ilium's fall with its broad and vivid picture of the Olympian hierarchy. The Homeric conception by these means had grown rooted and fixed in Greek life, making a religious centre around which the national existence might revolve in an harmonious orbit. It defined the general national life, fixed its proportions and its limits, and under the spell of its dominant and universal gravitation held the Greek polities in one consentaneous system in spite of their local differences and petty jealousies. But while up to this time it was

* Called the rhapsodoi or aodoi.

a narrow life moving within a restricted orbit, pent up within the simplicity of the Homeric conception, there was little range for the latent energies of Greek genius, and not until we find the Hellenic peoples brought face to face with a threatening catastrophe, whose successful issue would have meant the extinction of their religious, their political and, perhaps, racial existence, do we see the Greek mind aroused and actuated to the plenitude of its powers.

The great event which re-awakened the common energies of all Greece and pitted the Hellenes once more against the Orient, as they had been before arrayed in the days of Agamemnon, was the invasion of Darius. Persia came down upon Greece in myriads, for the power of the great king was in the multitudes of his armies. The monstrous passive power of the East as a creeping inundation seemed to be about to engulf and swallow up Hellas like an island in the waters of the great sea. Greece rallied again to a common standard, and with a fierce and resistless activity scattered back the great king's multitudes like a swift whirlwind amongst the

dead leaves of an autumn forest. It was again the Occident against the Orient, the power of energy against force of weight; it was mind against matter. All Greece was aroused and concentrated against the common danger. In this tremendous effort for national salvation, she awoke to a wider life; for the first time the contact of her existence widened beyond the Homeric limits. She learned of a world beyond her own; of other peoples and other conceptions of human existence. As she expanded by this Odyssean experience she at the same time concentrated. Her genius began to gather power under the stimulus of a wider environment, and at the same time grew in intensity. The silent life within the bud began to stir and, blowing, unfold itself to bloom a little over a century and then to fade away.

Herodotus was the Greek Ulysses of the sixth century before Christ. He became the muchly traveled man, who discovered many cities and learned the minds and manners of many peoples in lands remote. All this knowledge of another world than Greece he gathered and expounded in his great history

with the purpose of making it subserve the glory of his native land. All that he recounts of the minds and manners of strange peoples are so many separate leaves he wreathes into the laurel crown of Hellenic victories; for Greece had overthrown the great king and beat him back in ignominous disaster to the banks of the Euphrates, and this great king was the sovereign lord and master of the world, not Greece. The mythology, the tradition, the science, the geography of all those vast regions peopled by strange races, Herodotus binds together into a common sheaf to lay at the feet of Hellenic pride, for all these were subservient to the great king, and the great king himself the humiliated foe of Greek valor. "Herodotus," says Schlegel,* "is the Homer of history, the Homer of prose, the fullest and most copious of all mythologists, and sets clearly before our view the whole epic of ancient ethnology. * * * The prose narrative of mythographers, as a whole, still rang with the tone and manner of the epic, and in Herodotus, its great master, from the grace and fullness which charac-

* F. Schlegel, History of Literature.

terize it, the Homeric origin of the epic form of history is most clearly seen." As Homer had sung the Hellenic victory over the Orient five centuries before, Herodotus chants his prose epic as a pæan of Greek prowess over the hords of the great king, the sovereign lord of the outer world beyond. As Homer had gathered and crystallized the spirit of Greek national life in the Iliad six hundred years prior, Herodotus gathered and focused the larger life of Greece as it expanded under the new influences that came with the desperate struggles against the Persian invasions.

With this greater life of Greece came a greater literature. There was a distinctive and sharp advance beyond the old Homeric simplicity. The Olympian hierarchy remained substantially the same, it is true; Zeus was still Zeus and Athene was still the panoplied daughter of wisdom sprung full armed from the teeming forehead of the ceraunian father; the bullock was still sacrificed at the steaming altar, and the rich libation poured in honor of the gods as in the days of Homeric faith. But that outer region of

vague necessity, which ever encompassed the Olympian world like an iron blackness, was narrowing in upon the realms of gods and men. The unfathomed mystery beyond, within whose abysses the unseen destiny of mankind lay, was beginning to press in upon human consciousness. Not that the old faith in Olympus had altogether weakened, but beyond the abodes of the happy immortals had arisen upon the distant horizon the dun clouds of a laboring difficulty, the advancing night of a problem, from which Greece had heretofore persistently turned its eyes and with the simplicity of its childhood, had forgotten in the riot of an unrestrained imagination. It was as if the hosts of the East, swarming about Greece, threatening desolation and extinction, were the physical image of the moral fact which Greece had so long ignored. For five centuries had the Hellenes dwelt undisturbed by any external menace in the happy garden regions that girt the smiling Mediterranean, about whose balmy shores nature is one perpetual bloom. The stream of life ran with an easy fall mirroring rich skies, dimpled seas and soft empurpled moun-

tains, all space and time the flowery mead of mortal happiness, and when it embouched into eternity, its waters glided into that unknown ocean with a gentle and unruffled flood. Under those constant summer skies, as soft as bright, Greek life blossomed and bloomed as fair and as luxuriantly as nature herself.

Out of this happy dream Greece was roughly awakened to the sudden realization of an impending horror. The multitudinous Orient was pouring herself down in devastation and ruin upon this Hellenic paradise. Here was a sudden and sharp realization of what Greece had so long thrust from herself, destiny in grim horror irrupting into the fair regions of her happy content. Here was black fate sucking up into the hollow whirlwind of its night the splendor of Olympian glory and the brightness of the Hellic imagination. With the palpable fact and the imminent horror of the Persian invasion before its startled eyes, the Greek imagination, always lively and impressionable, saw the physical image of that moral problem, which it had feared with a childish terror and

ignored with a childish ease, loom before it vast, terrible and insoluble. The Olympian scheme of the universe could give no answer to that awful problem of fate, but accentuated and emphasized it; the very gods were the victims of the dark destiny which overhung the visible universe. The Orient itself, whence that horror had again arisen, was a cimmerian blackness. Persia had no word to dispel it; she painted a god of essential evil, against whose dark power the god of goodness had made no eternal progress. Between these two powers was perpetual conflict with no issue in victory. Between both was fate mightier than either.

Driven inward upon themselves, the Greek mind and the Greek imagination, roused to the anxious inquiry of the problem that had suddenly confronted them like a mocking spectre long forgotten in their ancient childhood, began to speak out the laboring thought within, sought to utter the burden of the perplexity that travailed in the surcharged soul, and with the intensity of the life of the Greek intellect began to elaborate its philosophies, forever reaching out to the obscure limits of fate and

forever beaten back upon itself confounded and exhausted. While it built up a great and harmonized system of reason, it shed no ray of light upon that one problem in which the riddle of the universe lay unsolved. Greek philosophy never encompassed fate and never sounded the abyss of divine and human freedom. Around about its systems of philosophy, as around about the narrow circle of its Olympian theology, lies the same unsolved darkness of necessity. Though indeed its philosophies in the hands of Plato and Aristotle broadened and expanded the Olympian scheme of the universe immensely beyond the Homeric conception, indeed so radically widened and spiritualized and transformed the ancient puerilities, that they are only metaphorically recognizable under their philosophic guise, still they never touched the one vital problem, whose mystery always invincibly encompassed Greek thought and Greek life. Fate was as much of a mystery to Plato and Aristotle as it had been to Homer. In the alembic of human reason (and amongst no people in the world did unassisted human reason advance as far as amongst the

Greeks), the black pearl of destiny has ever remained insoluble. Man has ever striven to resolve fate into freedom, but no unassisted human tongue has ever given utterance to the answer that illuminates its ancient darkness into light. The heathen world lay impotent in the darkness of that problem until the fulfillment of the time when the eternal Light of the Divine Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.

While Greek philosophy was traversing the periphery of human reason and sounding its limitations, at the same time expounding the rational science as it had never before been expounded, and pointing the term of its natural impotence in a vain endeavor to scale the looming bastions of that outer mystery, the Greek imagination encountered and strove with the same dark problem, forever proposed and forever unanswered, like a vast sounding board gathering the uttered syllables and whispering them back in barren echoes. It is in the Greek drama especially that the Greek imagination siezes upon this dark subject and bodies it forth in all the statuesque pomp of the Greek theater.

On the stage the imagination has a power of expansion not enjoyed elsewhere, and on the Greek stage the imagination had unique opportunities to magnify and ennoble its imagery to the utmost limits. Here it could use not only speech, but employ the adjuncts of color and form and music in magnificent proportions. Moreover the religious element lay at the very basis of Greek dramatic art. The Greek theater originally grew out of the sacrificial pomp of religious rites, and this threw an atmosphere of sanctity around about the drama that gave it an immense power and influence over the popular mind. The result was to give Greek tragedy the character of a religious representation. A concomitant cause for this trend and development lay in the fact that its radical conception, not only sprouted from current religious rites, but struck down deeper into the mystery of the underlying fate, from which it drew its main inspiration. Growing out of religious rites and dealing with that vague and formless image of fate, which brooded over its *mis-en-scene* as the only possible background for its tremendous situations, it essentially

assumed a semi religious character and in some measure took the place of the narrower Homeric theology, becoming in the newly awakened Hellenic life, succeeding the Persian invasions, as wide a religiou sinfluence as the old theology. Fate is its key-note, the encompassing periphery of its action or rather its passion, for Greek tragedy did not so much express action as a passive state in grouped attitudes or situations. And this arose from the very fact that its dominant and controlling factor was an inflexible destiny moulding human events blindly and secretly. Men were therefore passive victims of this vague power unseeing and unseen; as against it, theirs was a state of passion, of suffering which they neither foresaw, could avert or control. Howsoever they may use their human activities, the resultant sum of their lives was in the crushing hand of fate. It was this conditioned state of passion or suffering in human existence that Greek tragedy synthesized in its statuesque panorama.* The divisions of its drama were prolonged situations, fixed attitudes, grouped

* De Quincy, "Theory of Greek Tragedy."

resultants of the hand of fate arranging, but blindly and without visible aim, the events of human living. Even fate itself seemed not to be an active power; it was rather a force dragging along its hapless victims with its own deadly inertia. Fate was an immovable necessity, crushing away all semblance of freedom in its victims, and itself equally destitute of the power of self-movement and therefore of freedom. Men were depicted in a state of suffering by Greek tragedy because they were not free agents but victims.

The proportions of things thus presented are colossal; their representation cannot be cabined and confined; they require no ordinary stage for their vast setting. Nothing short of the heavens themselves allow breathing room for that immense tableau. There is a Titanic element here that needs must have spacious room in which to repose its vast stature without cramping. Hence you have the Greek stage open to the skies and auditoriums vast enough to seat thirty thousand people, as in the great theater at Athens.*

* Mahaffy and Duruy say ten thousand. This lesser numeral is quite enough for our purpose.

Under the necessity of this immensity, in keeping with the vastness of its representation, the setting of the stage must bear an adequate proportion. To such an audience the human voice would have been lost, the human features miniatured to invisibility and the human stature dwarfed by distance. "Hence," says De Quincey, "the person must be aggrandized, the countenance must be idealized. For upon any stage corresponding in its scale to the colossal dimensions of such a house, the unassisted human figure would have been lost; the unexaggerated human features would have been seen as in a remote perspective, and besides, have had their expression lost; the unreverberated human voice would have been indistinguishable from the surrounding murmers of the audience; hence the cothurnus to raise the actor; hence the voluminous robes to hide the disproportion thus resulting to the figure; hence the mask, larger than life, painted to represent the noble Grecian contour of countenance; hence the mechanism by which it was made to swell the intonations of the voice like the brazen tubes of an organ." Though De

Quincey sees the mechanical reasons for the magnification of the person of the actor and the stage properties, he fails to see the moral relation out of which this necessity of the enlargement of human proportions was based in the Grecian theater. The Greek drama was big with fate; the scene of the dramatist was set in the awful vastness of destiny. Limned only by that colossal indefiniteness, his tableaux vivants must be lifted out of the minimized proportions of daily life to dimensions in keeping with the vague grandeur of the immense distances which encompassed them in a twilight of shadows. This indistinct gloom of the perspective naturally magnified all objects in the foreground. We have therefore an exaggerated stage setting, and that the proportion between actor and audience may be preserved, a vast auditorium to give relative effect to the fixtures of cothurnus, mask and voluminous robe.

Up to the time of the Persian invasion Greece had lived in a distant forgetfulness of fate. The great convulsions consequent upon this inroad, frightful with such dire menaces, woke the Greek mind to the startled

recognition of an awful presence in the world which baffled and confounded it. Zeus remained the sovereign of Olympus but with his glory dimmed; destiny intruded its gloom even into those realms of light, while it darkened the lives of men. Three great tragedians arose in Greece at this period, whose varied genius caught and embodied the vast shadow which was then projected like the darkness of a gathering storm over the bright skies of the Greek world. These were Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides; within the compass of whose lives—a span of time within a century and a half—the power of Greece rose to its fullness, its glory passed through the splendor of its zenith and began to wane to its setting. Each according to his place and time dealt with the same problem, each in his own peculiar relation put the same question and each failed to answer it according to his special circumstances, for all were circumscribed by the same general limitations. Each dealt with destiny in a special relation, and we can trace successively in the three the continuously narrowing compass of the problem, until in Euripides, the last in the series,

we see it disintegrate into a skepticism, into which the integrity of the old theogony had naturally crumbled under the crushing blows of a difficulty for which Greek wit could find no answer, but which it easily dissipated into doubt or indifference or despair.

The theme of Æschylus was a conflict of humanity with fate. Prometheus is a Titan, but he is human and he typifies humanity, which had against the divine decree attempted heaven. He lies prostrate under the angry thunderbolt of Zeus. Æschylus caught the echo of the ancient tradition of the fall of man and of the attempt of human pride to scale heaven. Between man and heaven there was conflict under the domination of destiny, the almighty power sovereign over Zeus himself and sovereign inexorable. It was the decree of fate that man should rebel, that Prometheus should assault heaven and suffer the condign wrath of a jealous god, who in his turn, as the dark prophecy ran, was to be precipitated into the abyss by the same immovable power. Fate was the supreme power whose seat was beyond the visibly ordered universe in the womb of darkness, whence

issued the irresistible decree that smote men and gods alike. Humanity in conflict with that dark power, humanity struggling for freedom like a bound Titan, helpless yet instinctively seeking redemption, and groping blindly for a solution of the dark problem that had robbed even Olympus of its splendor, was the massive theme of the muse of Æschylus.

With Sophocles the problem narrowed down. It was no longer the Titanic conflict of humanity seeking to shake off the incumbent horror of fate from its laboring breast like a heavy sleeper struggling against dark dreams, but it was Greece, the Hellenic nationality pitted against the unknown power pressing in upon it and shattering its greatest and chiefest, pitilessly pursued to destruction. Instead of Prometheus representing humanity smitten and bound, the victim of the cold and universal terror of human existence, it is now Œdipus, typifying the Hellenic nationality, relentlessly driven and lashed by the fury of destiny. Preserved by destiny from destruction in his infancy, he is led by the same dark power unwittingly to bring unutter-

able woe and destruction upon his own house and upon himself. By his own hand does he deprive himself of sight to typify the blindness of the fate that destroys him and the darkness of the labyrinth of human life in the invisible mesh of destiny. In the time of Sophocles Hellenic nationality had become solidified. The common danger of the Persian invasion had compacted Grecian life into unity. The supremacy of the Hellenic peoples had been indubitably manifested in their victory over the great king. Greece was now sovereign and one. In her nationality was humanity supremely centered, and the problem of destiny lay compassed within the bounds of her national existence. Beyond her, humanity was inchoate and barbarous. In the ear of Æschylus had lingered the echo of the ancient tradition, reverberating with the fall of humanity in the distant Orient. In the pæan of Greek victory, in the joyous note of the triumph of Greek nationality was lost that echo and Sophocles heard it not. For him Greece was the world and the Hellenic peoples humanity. Fate in his purview was concerned with Greece alone. Upon his

stage the *mis-en-scene* was the strife between destiny and the Hellenes. The larger interest of the universal conflict between fate and mankind was lost in the concentrated interest of the war of fate against Greek dynasties. With both Æschylus and Sophocles fatality was the sovereign power. The iron bounds of destiny set the measure of their theme. With Æschylus the conflict was elemental, primitive, gigantic; it swept the heavens and unheaved the bowels of the earth; the visible universe was the theater of its rage and its blindness. The key-note of the strife in Sophocles is less turbulent but more intense. Its wild energy is pent within the bounds of Greek life and its disaster concentrated in the destruction of Greek sovereignties. Both are Greek; both retain intact the Olympian hierarchy and theogony in their integrity. Both have full faith in Olympian Zeus and the rites of the national religion. With both the insistent pressure of the problem of destiny has not destroyed, though it may have widened and changed the Homeric conception. With both, revolt against the Homeric scheme in the religious world, skepticism or doubt of

the old theogony, were blasphemies against the gods and a fatal blow to Hellenic life and nationality. Fate indeed was the prime problem to be faced, but never at the expense of the religious life of Greece. They felt instinctively, or we may say knew consciously, that the Homeric conception was at the roots of Greek vitality.

But even in the day of Æschylus had begun the decay of the Homeric creed, which was gradually to eat down to the roots of the popular faith and canker the life of the tree. In Sophocles, Greek genius reached the full flower of its beauty, still drawing its nourishment from the ancient fountains and stimulated to its ripest fruit under the benign influence of a widened and at the same time a gloriously national life. But the fatal worm of skepticism was even then searing its way to the heart of the nation, and the blight of the canker soon manifested itself in the leaf. Euripides, the third of the great trilogy of the Greek tragedians, ushers in the period of decadence, and shows, in the now darkened sanctities of art, the cerements of Hellenic literature. Euripides still deals with fate as did

his two great predecessors. Fate is still the all-absorbing problem of Greek tragedy, but with Euripides it is narrowed to a lesser compass than before. Æschylus dealt with fate as the problem of the universe, Sophocles as the problem of Greek nationality, but Euripides brings it down to the individual; it is no longer humanity in conflict with the great mystery, no longer Greek sovereignty, it is now the individual crushed in its mighty grasp.* But Greek genius and the Hellenic conception did not understand individuality. Indeed within the whole range of paganism the individual had no place; the great conception of the supreme and immortal individual, which was to recreate human society and open up the way to civil and domestic freedom by the infinite fecundity of the Christian word, was a closed secret to the pagan mind. When Euripides brought the individual and fate into tragic opposition, he confronted mystery with mystery, involved darkness in darkness. Antagonism was swallowed in cataclysm. The individual, atom so feeble, so insignificant, counted for nothing in the whirling

* Hello, "Les Passions, les Caractères et les Ames."

maelstrom. There could be in the Greek mind no adequate basis for a conflict between an inexorable and omnipotent power and the puny strength of the individual. The notion of justice, which with the two elder dramatists lay centered in the jurisdiction of Olympian Zeus, the governor of the visible universe, was fast disappearing in the day of Euripides. As long as fate was concerned with humanity, or with dynasties and peoples remaining remote from the small concerns of the individualized life too petty in itself to become the distinctive mark of its blind vengeance, there was little or no occasion to bring the individual into conflict with it. For the individual the Olympian hierarchy filled the entire region of providence, and his relation to the divine was consummated in his religious duties to Zeus and the lesser gods. Here for him was the seat of justice, the world of reward or punishment. Fate was too distant from him and he too small to be a proportionate object of regard in the wide bounds of its remote darkness. Universal humanity or national dynasties might commensurately fall within the shadow of its gloom or feel the dire stress of its storm,

but the individual, though indirectly involved in the common fate, had no immediate or insistent relation to that far-off mystery, in whose unlocked secret the destiny of both gods and men lay hidden.

But when skepticism had eaten away the ancient faith in Olympus, when trust in the providence of the Olympian hierarchy had corroded into doubt under the jeer and the scoff of the sophist, and the golden splendor about the abodes of the gods had blanched into the cold mists of unfaith, the life of the individual shriveled in the blast like a leaf under the frosts of winter. The skepticism that laid Olympus in ruins, shivered the image of the Greek ideal of humanity magnified to the proportions of divinity. Greece drew its life from that conception, dwelt in the brightness of that idealization and grew to its maturity under the influence of its sunlight. Doubt in the national faith was the paralysis of Greek power, the poison at the fountain-head which dried up the sap of its genius and withered the green of its laurels. Euripides illustrates the period of its decadence. He was, with some modification, the Voltaire

of his time.* Skepticism had destroyed faith in the gods, but left the individual defenseless against the irony of destiny. Zeus no longer reigns and justice, personified in the father of the gods, perishes from out the world. Note that the chorus of Euripides no longer plays the part in Greek drama which it took in Æschylus and Sophocles. In these the chorus was a substantial and essential portion of the tragedy. It was the expression of justice overseeing the movement of the drama, albeit a limited and imperfect justice that saw neither the beginning nor the end of the events, whose origin and whose finality lay in the invisible regions of fate. It was the justice of Olympian agencies supervising the affairs of men within the limits of their purview. Hidden from it indeed was the answer to the great mystery which hemmed in the lives of both gods and men, but within the sphere of religious life and the confines of the Olympian sway, it preserves order and delivers judgment. Though in the dark decree of fate it sees not the purpose or the end, it acknowledges a reverent submission and a

* Plumptre.

blind trust in a justice beyond its ken. But with Euripides the chorus becomes a mere mechanical echo, neither seeing nor overseeing. Oftentime it has no relation at all to the dramatic movement and is artificially introduced for the sake of effect, a piece of lyrical declamation irrelevantly introduced. With the sweeping away of the belief in the Olympian providence the idea of justice in man's life was fading away from the Greek mind, and when that stage in the decadence is reached, the Greek chorus loses its organic place in the Greek drama and sinks to the level of mere meretricious ornament.

With Euripides began the period of decline. After him, though here and there perhaps a flash of the old genius, there survived only imitation and rhetoric. It was with Greece as with all peoples, death comes with skepticism. When doubt entered into Greek life, when its mythology became the subject of skeptical analysis, when the humanized divinity of the Hellenic imagination was dragged down from Olympus to the streets of Athens and there flouted and jeered at by philosopher and sophist, then the spirit of

Greek life began to perish, its glory to fade, its literature to sink to the barren levels of the professional rhetorician, who bought and sold eloquence like a truck merchant in the public market. Meantime the Roman power was looming like a baleful colossus in the West. When Rome subdued Greece, the Roman soldier imagined that he could as readily appropriate the literary genius of Hellas as he had her cities and her lands. But when he came, the spirit of that genius had perished. Greece could give Rome a recipe for style, but could not quicken the mechanical energy of the military despotism of the Tiber to the vital power of the genius which had made Athens the chief glory of the ancient world.

ROME.

A peoples' history is not all to be found in the simple facts and events of their existence. Their tradition and their myth often give a clue to their character not fully seen in the crystallized data of their national life. What they are and what they do is easily seen in their chronicles; but why they are what they are, and why they do what their history records of them, is quite another question, whose solution depends upon something more than the palpable evidence of their deeds and the manifestation of their policies in the tract of time traversed in the movement of their destiny. The historian may gather all the complicated data of their existence, trace their rise and their fall, point the term of their progress, draw the moral of their decline, and yet miss the spirit of their very life, mistake the purport of their character and leave the problem of their history unsolved,

if he fails to comprehend the nature of their traditions and to conceive the ideal which has primarily shaped their aspirations. This is because the achievements of a people are only the outward sign of the invisible soul animating and guiding them to the goal, which marks the accomplishment of their destiny. Their institutions are the concretions of the spirit, which fashions and develops the body social and the body politic on lines originally predetermined by hidden powers and virtues rooted deep and out of sight in the dim beginnings of their life. The original influences that shaped them are pre-natal and their subsequent development, in the matured life of the nation, but follows the lines of character limned in the embryo in the womb.

It is in the national tradition and mythus of a people that we find the echoes of those primitive determinants of their character and the unconscious formulation of their ideal. They themselves may not reflectively comprehend the principle which underlies their national existence; they may not perceive the goal of their progress in the trend of events, for their development will spontaneously

follow the originally organized instinct of their constitution, explicating and fulfilling itself in their exploits and their institutions. They will not be free to change or divert the movement of the national life without destroying it root and branch, and they will therefore move with it harmoniously to its destined close. And as long as they preserve and guard the national tradition and mythus in their original freshness so long will the spirit of their peculiar nationality remain vigorous and active amongst them; but when the tradition and the mythus fade out of their conviction, their ideal becomes blurred and decay strikes at the roots of their life.

If then we wish to know why an ancient people were what they were and not simply rest satisfied in the chronicle of their achievements, we must read their history as well in the light of their tradition as in the authenticated record of their deeds. Of no great people in the history of humanity is this so true as of the Romans whose prowess and whose accomplishment in the movements of human time fulfilled their early aspirations more completely than those of any other single people

in history. Her beginnings are shrouded in obscurity and she seemed to rise in the substantial might of her power like a giant exhalation from the clouds and mists of myth and fable. Modern criticism has sifted with discerning finger the fiction from the authentic fact in her long and wonderful career. With unwearied patience and with commendable acuteness it has unraveled the tangled skein of fact and fiction, which Rome herself has transmitted to us as the record of her history, and reduced to the hard and fast line of critical verification the story of her wonderful rise from the most obscure to the most conspicuous people in all history.*

But modern criticism in the fervor of its zeal for fact seems to have forgotten both that a great people does not live by facts alone and that their history becomes a mere flat and dull surface lacking illumination and perspective, without the colorings of its tradition and the light of its ideal to give it depth and proportion, harmony and meaning. Man exploits himself in his deeds; but without the spiritual and mental life back of his

* Niebhur, Momsen, Arnold.

action as the impelling power of his achievement and the ideal of his effort, he would never make history. The life of the brute is one continuous series of material facts, but it is nothing more; it has no history. The concatenation of facts in man's life is history, because it has a meaning to explain them and give them sequence in a higher order. Facts are but the external data of his spiritual life, which is both their source and their reason. If we would know why he acts as he does and find no adequate answer in the mere record of his deed itself, we must ascend to that hidden life of the spiritual in him where lie the agencies that move and direct him upward or onward or downward. In the life of a great nation those secret springs, whose outward play is visible in their deeds, but without complete solution there, may be found symbolized in their traditions and their myths, which are in large measure the deeper and spontaneous expression of their character and their ideal.

If then we would fully estimate the real meaning of Roman history, if we would know the philosophy of its history and by

consequence of its literature, we must look, not simply to the verified facts of its existence, but to that wider and broader and profounder understanding of its traditions and its myths, in which unconsciously, indeed, but fully and clearly the Roman people revealed their inner heart, their character, their aspiration and their ideal. It may be true that their claim of lineage from Æneas was without the slightest foundation in fact, the merest fable of a vague tradition from the regions of cloud land; that the story of Romulus suckled by a wolf was a mythus gathered by the rude imagination of an uncultured people about the hazy headlands of a distant past, where cloud and shadow played in fantastic shapes; that the sacrifice of his son to the welfare of the State by Brutus was a legend blown down the ages by the spirit of fable; in short, that Roman history down to the days of the Republic has no foundation in authentic fact; and, yet, in the myth and the fable of all this tradition is to be found, in unmistakable outline and in substantial figure, the vast image of the Roman character and ideal, out of which

issued the movement of her tremendous destiny to the domination of the world.

Whether or not Æneas came from fated Troy to Latium's shores and from his loins sprang a race of native kings destined to be Rome's progenitors, Rome had faith in the tradition and by it expressed her conviction of her own origin in the Orient and the instinct of her affinity with the East. She brought from the Orient the shadow of the great tragedy which had enswathed the Oriental mind, the tradition of the fall of man and the sense of his overwhelming loss. But in the transition from the original seat of the race the tradition became metamorphosed. Man in the Orient, still in the pristine seat of the original failure, retained the bitter knowledge that he had been cut off from divine communion and had forfeited an infinite inheritance. In his unutterable woe he turned from the meaner prospects of terrestrial things, and withdrawing himself to the abstract regions of contemplation sought immediate reunion with the Infinite. He had forfeited the power of the dominion of the earth when he had cut himself off from that divine communion, and he

passively submitted to his loss seeking the way of escape from the consequent tyranny of nature by transcending its exigencies in the effort of contemplation. He had fallen from his bright pre-eminence over the visible world, his mastery of all terrestrial beings, and burdened with the sense of his heavy guilt, felt himself unable to rise in the order of nature to the ancient lordship which had been his by birthright. Rome brought from the Orient the remembrance of man's once universal dominion of the earth, but under the pressure of new conditions in a new life, calling forth practical effort to gain a foothold in the midst of adverse circumstances, turned aside from the passive contemplation of Orientalism, and under the impulse of the ancient tradition addressed herself to the rehabilitation of the universal domination of man over the earth by bodily activity. Rome would subjugate the world and make her domination universal and eternal. This was the instinct of her constitution ; that instinct was her tradition and her ideal. She moved to it under the belief of a celestial predetermination. She moved to it from the very

beginning, persistently and relentlessly, suffering nothing to bar her course and convinced of her universal and eternal destiny to become the supreme mistress of the world. She concentrated all her powers to that one end. Her dominion was to be founded in the force of arms; she seized by conquest and held by the power of her legions. Her genius was militarism, the application of power by force, government by rule.

This ambition of universal domination was the remnant of her tradition from the Orient, the tradition of man's primitive dominion of the earth, but a departure from the Oriental notion of the way of restoration. With Rome the divine was not the goal of spiritual contemplation, but was embodied in the power of the Roman State, the universal and eternal governor of the world. Divine order lay in the supremacy of political order ordained and established by Roman law. The State was the divine institution in which man was to find once again the universal and eternal mastery of the world. The divinity of the Roman State was the supreme sanctity. Before this were all nations to bow, by the

force of that supremacy were all to be subjugated.

Under the impulse of what was her tradition and at the same time the fashioning form of her ideal, grew the massive engine of Roman power and the elaborate machinery of her rule. It was an immense mechanical militarism, subordinating and holding the world in subjection by force.

When she fables Romulus, the immediate founder of the eternal city, suckled by a wolf, she gives us the symbol of her constitutional instinct; the voracity of her insatiable ambition, her wolfish instinct to devour all peoples that come in her path. When she fables Brutus sacrificing his own son to the State, she again symbolizes to us the omnipotent divinity of the State demanding the immolation of all human affections and ties upon its altars, the subordination of all domestic society to the unquestionable supremacy of the political body. When Curtius leaps into the gulf to save Rome, she typifies the utter annihilation of the individual to the exigency of that supreme power. Scævola's burning hand is a picture of Roman fortitude

in maintaining at any cost or suffering the political supremacy of eternal Rome. Whether fact or fiction, whether founded upon historical data or the figments of imagination, it is in these pictures of herself which Rome has handed down to us and which she zealously treasured as national types and models, that we see the image of her own ideal and the source of her indomitable pertinacity in the building up of her political fabric upon the ideal of the universal domination of the earth. It is the image of her true self as she herself presents it to posterity, the likeness of her spirit not perhaps so readily manifest in the authentic chronicle of her historical deeds, but visible rather in the moral and mental features, which a people unconsciously make evident in their traditions and fable. The universality of her rule and the eternity of its duration was the vast and supreme faith of Rome. This immense conviction overshadowed and dominated all things else. It loomed up on every horizon of the Roman mind, was its zenith and its nadir. It was the parodied image of the dream of the Orient diverted from the original aspiration after the

dominion of the earth by virtue of a transcendent spiritual power and transformed into an insatiate ambition of the universal domination of the world by force. To subdue by force and to hold by the mechanical power of the rule was the Roman conception of political virtue. Method was her power; militarism her dominant idea; her legions the iron engines through which she applied it according to the formulæ of mechanics.

Under the severe discipline of this national mechanism and the inflexible lines of its rigid application little room was left for the various play of the human imagination. Subordinated to the conception of the absolute supremacy of the political mechanism were all other considerations; indeed in the Roman mind all virtue was drawn from the political fountain-head in the Supreme State. Domestic rights and duties took their source there; the individual began and ended there. The be-all and the end-all was Rome, the vast engine that ground the world in its ponderous jaws fashioning all things human to the model of a stereotyped law. She knew nothing of the spirit of beauty, of the freedom

of that interior power of life, which assimilates to itself the elements about it, transforms them into its own likeness and gives them forth vitalized into the various images of its own interior spirit. The power of the variety of the human imagination was crushed out under the vast weight of machinery and the political necessity that pressed downward pitilessly throughout the whole social structure. Method, the external application of power, was her sole notion of construction; beauty, the interior power of growth and development expanding into the freedom of expression, she could not understand. The same necessity that paralyzed the imagination of the Orient crushed the imagination of Rome. In the Orient necessity was speculative and drew the mind irresistibly from terrene things to the abyss of the infinite. In Rome necessity was practical and mechanized the mind and the imagination under the pressure of a concrete force finding its completest and supremest expression in the engine of State. In the East necessity drew the mind from the visible universe in time and space as the empty pageant of the nothingness

of finitude; in Rome necessity drove the mind, which had left behind it the tradition of the Infinite, to the acceptance of the physical universe under the law of force as the sum of all existence. The Oriental mind sought the full meaning and goal of life in the distant embrace of the infinite beyond the shadowing pall of time and space; the Roman mind sought the meaning and the end of life in the plenitude of time and space under the rule of Rome. The goal of all her enterprise was Rome universal and Rome eternal in the concrete universe.

Under the ascendency of this idea Roman genius was concentrated in the execution of military government. There was but one aim and one clearly defined constitutional line to the goal of all Roman effort. Little room, therefore, was left for the freedom of the exercise of the human imagination, the field of the cultivation of literature. The genius of militarism is incompatible with the spirit of literature. The power of machinery is not the power of life. Its force may be vast and terrific; the lever of Archimedes could lift the world, if he could only find a

point of leverage, but the world it would then lift would be a dead world. The genius of mechanism has no power in a living world. Life is a power beyond the forces of mechanism; it precedes them and survives them. Its power is of its own motion and from within. Mechanism can alter and arrange, juxtapose and fashion external things in their exterior relations, but it cannot animate nor can it create. To the subtle spirit of life alone is given the power to make live. Its vital energy reaches out to the elements around about it, seizes upon them and inspires them with its own living power, multiplying and propagating its own image and transmitting its creative power in new forms, showing forth its virtue of variety organically imaging the unity of its essence.

The genius of literature is therefore a living spirit. It propagates itself by creative power and mechanism is fatal to its virtue. Its law is the law of life, transmitting itself by living processes through organisms replete with its own life. The application of its power is therefore interior, by way of growth. It expands from within outwardly, unfolding

itself like the petals of a flower in the radiance and beauty of its own interior spirit. Rome knew no such living law. Her genius was method, the external application of mechanical powers, accreting and arranging, but incapable of growth or of transmitting the power of growth. The spirit of literature was therefore not her own, and she had no literature until she imported the fashion of Greek rhetoric. Her first attempts at literary expression were rude imitations and crude translations of Greek writers.* The beginnings of her literature never rose beyond this dignity, for Rome had no power of self-expression. Constitutionally she had no capacity of literary exploitation, and true to her instinct of mechanism, followed an established model, which she found ready made amongst the conquered Hellenes. Her early writers were bold imitators, mere translators of the Greeks: Ennius, Pacuvius, Atticus, Plautus and Terrence in the main slavishly followed Greek dramatists, in both subject and manner.

The supposition that prior to the age of

* F. W. Schlegel, "History of Literature."

these early Roman dramatists there existed amongst the Romans epic poems surpassing the works of later times "in power and brilliancy of imagination" is a baseless fancy without trace of justification either in authentic history or in tradition. There were, it is true, the Saturnine songs in rough verses, a sort of crude rural ballad of local character, chanted on special occasions in the houses of the rich or at festivals, but there is no reason to suppose that they were either epic or brilliant. The very fact that they laid no foundation for a national literature is evidence of their purely ephemeral nature and the total lack of the true literary spirit amongst the Romans; for it is out of the legendary lore and first imperfect utterances of primitive ballads of such character, that the literature of nearly all peoples has germinated as from a vital seed. The Saturnine ballads of Rome proved sterile, themselves perishing utterly and leaving no trace behind them save the vague memory that they once existed. Roman literature had no roots in the Roman past or in the Roman life. It first came by way of direct imitation consciously and

openly copied from an alien literature whose vitality had fled.

After the successful issue of the third Punic war the Roman power rapidly expanded to its fullness. In the contest with Carthage the obdurate force of mechanism was pitted in a death struggle against the spirit of craft, method against the caprice of cunning.* Carthage had set out to devour the world in the spirit of the lust of money; her greed was sensual; like a boa she would glut herself upon the material possessions of mankind; she had the guile of the serpent, the venom of its sting and its treacherous instinct. Punic faith was a by-word amongst the nations. The appetite of the Roman wolf was as insatiable as that of the Punic reptile, but it was the passion for power not the greed of sensual gain; it was the ambition of universal rule, not the lust of the flesh. Rome moved to her destiny by rule; she progressed by an iron discipline, and the power of order overcame the caprice of passion. Rome and Carthage, as they advanced from their respective centers of power, were inevitably destined to

* Hello, "L'Homme," Book III., L'Art.

meet in battle for the possession of the earth. Neither could brook the presence of the other and survive; and Cato voiced the Roman spirit when he declared that Carthage must be utterly destroyed. The world was not large enough to provide room for another power than the majesty of Rome. *Carthago delenda est:* Cato appreciated the necessity of Rome's destiny. It was the same Cato who foresaw the fate of the majesty of the Roman name under the insidious influence of the decadent literature of Greece. Carthage she could subdue by force of arms; the inviolable discipline of her legions could crush out the irregulated spirit of armed intrigue, which flamed in the veins of the Phœnician enemy. But in the effeminate refinement of the Greek decadence he saw the entrance of a subtle foe too intangible for the stroke of the Roman sword, too impalpable to be strangled by the mailed hand of military discipline. As Cato had raised his voice in imperious imprecation against the menace of Carthagenian hostility, so with equal vehemence he declaimed against the admission of the Hellenic influence, so full of danger to the integrity of Roman

virtue, the iron power of militarism. Cato's warning was the instinctive protestation of Roman genius foreseeing the corruption, which was sure to follow upon the innoculation of the Roman blood with the feted poison of the Hellenic cadaver. But it was also more than this. It was the expression of the repugnance of the antagonism between the despotism of militarism and the spirit of freedom, which cherishes the genius of literature. Amongst the Hellenes the human imagination had ample room to expand into a variety of expression upon the problems of life and the play of human passion and interests in the range of time and space, because necessity, which was denominated fate, had been kept aloof up to the time of the decadence, from the active concerns of Greek life and distantly played its part in the background like a black storm on the verge of the farthest horizon. In the foreground shone the resplendent sunshine of Olympus breaking into a thousand colors over the immediate vistas of human activity, and only when Olympus was destroyed and that necessity brought down to the daily experience of individual existence,

was the Greek imagination balked in its play and stiffled in its original utterance, dissolving into the trifling details of skepticism and the putrescence of doubt.

But with Rome necessity had always been imminent; fate from the beginning was concreted into the omnipotent state; its irresistible decree was forever centered in the Roman imperium, and for high and low there was no possible escape from its immediate thunderbolt. Patrician and Plebeian equally bowed under its invincible and immediate fiat. Patriotism was the first virtue and it was a necessity rather than a virtue. In the imperium of Rome was the consummation of every citizen's existence, and disloyalty to this was annihilation. This supreme command, this perpetually present destiny pressed close upon every detail of human existence, sat familiarly by the hearthstone and bound the uses of human life by iron regulations destined to the one and sole end of the exaltation and perpetuation of the majesty of Rome. Regulus returned to Carthage because he had pledged the troth of the Roman imperium, and the genius of the omnipotent destiny

which ruled at Rome demanded the sacrifice. Had he broken his promise even with faithless Carthage he would have violated the majesty of Rome. Scævola thrust his hand into the consuming flame under the force of the same conception of the imperative demand requiring all things without exception from the citizen of eternal Rome. Universal and eternal fate sat enthroned in the Capitol and thence ruled the world with an inflexible law centered forever there. Under this constant eye, from whose vigilance was no escape, the life of the Roman citizen lay marked out and predestined. He came into being for the glory of eternal Rome, he consumed his days in her imperative service and he died as her bondman, whose years were worthy in proportion as he had promoted her interests and served her majesty.

Under the crushing weight of such a conception of human life and human destiny there was no possible play for literary utterance. The imagination was dominated by the one irresistible idea around which all the uses of life centered. There was no ground for the freedom of variety wherein the imagination

might range in the exercise of its powers. The immense image of the Roman imperium filled it and stereotyped it. Human affections, human passions, human ambitions were swept into its inexhaustible vortex. There could be no charm in nature for the eye always filled with the mailed image of Capitoline Jove, the personification of the Roman imperium, in whose inexorable right hand lay the thunderbolts of fate and the destiny of peoples. Power alone was virtue; the power of armies, the power of method, the fixed inflexible mechanical line of discipline, to swerve from which was a deadly crime.

For the first six centuries of her existence Rome gave forth no literary utterance.* Her life was not growing from the roots of freedom, but developing by rule; she had no power of literary utterance. She achieved great deeds of arms, because the exercise of arms is the application of mechanical power. She conquered the world by the might of her legions, but she, herself, had no power of speech. The power of utterance she was to

* Schlegel, "History of Literature," Sec. IV.

learn from another, a people whom she had conquered by the power of discipline.

When she came in contact with Greece she first wakened to the realization that it was given to man to utter himself in the power of the spoken word. Strange to say she who had dreamed of the eternity of her imperium and had wrought so mightily for its universal perpetuation in time, had never known the use of the only human power by which man, after he has disappeared from this passing scene, may perpetuate himself to immortality. The human word spoken in the freedom of truth is alone imperishable of all the works of man. The only human record, not subject to the power of time, is man's utterance in the word, the sign of his spiritual life inherent with the quality of immortality against the mutability of matter. Temples and monuments and cities, empires and peoples and races are forgotten in the memory of men and perish utterly in the vast stretches of time, but where the human word has found the freedom of utterance,* it rises above the vicissitudes of decay and transmits

* The power to speak the truth variously.

itself by a subtle spiritual power to posterity forever. Rome owes the chief immortality she enjoys to Greece. Her literary glory is not truly her own. It is the reflex of the brilliancy of the Greek imagination caught upon the burnished shield of Mars and deflected in scattered rays down the vistas of time.

Yet amongst no people were greater riches for poetic and epic lore laid up in the storehouse of her legend and her tradition. Fruitful beyond expectation are the themes of her myths. The story of Romulus, the combat of the Horatii, the deed of Regulus, the sacrifice of Curtius, the valor of Horatius, the history of Coriolanus, and a host of other legendary or historical traditions, crowd her prolific annals; yet she has no voice of song wherewith to exalt them. All that she does is to chronicle them in a later age in a cold and sober prose when she has learned the value of history from Greek models. Greece had taken vital hold of her legend and her tradition and wrought them into the large utterance of epic and tragedy. But Rome has no epic until the eighth century from the foundation

of the city, and that epic is not Roman, but a faint Homeric echo of the fountain-head of Greek literature. Roman tragedy is a servile imitation of the Greek; its theme is not Roman; she not only follows Greek models, but Greek subjects. Schlegel* tells us but half the truth when he declares that the Romans had no tragedy and no distinguished stage, because during their literary period their legendary storehouse was too nearly akin to the current events of their history. The Romans produced no tragedy, because they had no notion of its meaning; they had no notion of any possible ground of freedom against an omnipotent State, which straitened all the activities of life into its omnivorous service; they had no conception of the possible struggle of humanity or of a nation or an individual against fate, which furnished the theme and the motif of Greek tragedy. Conceiving the State to be supreme, the source and dispenser of all rights and duties, the very incarnation of fate, subordinating all things to itself, whose governance was always imminent, omnipresent and omnipotent, from whose

* "History of Literature."

decree there was no conceivable appeal or redress and resistance to which was flagitious and sacrilegious, the Romans utterly failed to conceive any notion of a possible field of freedom against the domination of the engine of Statehood, mechanically grinding out all alike into the Roman citizen, the soldier, to whom the rule of discipline was the supreme law of action and conduct. Tragedy deals with human passion in its impetuosity overleaping the bounds of the moral law and resulting in catastrophe.* It presupposes a rational free power, informed by virtue, capable of pursuing the moral good and by its own choice arriving at the goal of moral perfection. When reason abandons the way of righteousness and under the sting of passion blindly rejects the good, it rushes to the abyss. With the Roman there was but one passion and that mechanized into a hard and fast method, the passion of the omnipotence of Roman rule. With the Roman there was but one reason, the indubitable necessity of the Roman imperium. With the Roman there was but one virtue, unquestionable submission to the

* Hello, "Les Passions, les Caractères et les Ames."

supreme will of the State, which was to him at the same time divinity and fate. All his legendary lore illustrating this conception were pictures typical of it, examples to hold it up as an ideal, lessons whence all Roman virtue was to be learned. The current events of Roman history were so much akin to her legendary lore, because both her legend and her history sprang from the self-same source, both were the fruit of the Roman notion of the majesty of Rome, filling the horizon of all time and all space.

While the Roman imagination was taken up with the traditional legends, embodying this all-exclusive image, and her history was its practical exemplification in the social and political order, there was no place in the popular imagination, nor justification in the public spirit, for the fictitious representation of types or examples swerving from the traditional model or the actual exigencies of Roman life. Rome was too jealous to suffer the delineation, on the public stage or in her literature, of an example of character not in strict conformity with the Roman notion of public virtue—the root of the private morality of

her citizens. Not only was she too jealous to admit the public exhibition of such a type, but she had no conception of any ground for it. The passion that overleaped the barriers of public virtue was simply execrable and memorable only in infamy. Tragedy presents its errant character as in some part justifiable or excusable by excess of passion, under the stress of enormous provocation or the tyranny of fortuitous circumstances, which hopelessly immesh the victim and so awakens sympathy, while it captivates the judgment. Orestes in Greek tragedy, though justly punished for his sin, carried with him the sympathy of the auditor by reason of the flagitious crime which he had avenged. There is an undertone sounding throughout, that, though sinful, there is an element of righteousness in his deed. Fate had something to do both with the crime and its punishment and, in the person of Orestes, plays both the part of avenger and victim. Here was ground for the irruption of errant passion against the barriers of the moral law and an excuse, though not a justification, for its irregularity. But for the Roman

there was no possible excuse for an error against the rigid rule of the Roman imperium. Coriolanus, though treated with ingratitude, sinned irrevocably when he raised his arm in rebellion against the Roman majesty. He was wholly Rome's; life and all that belonged to life he derived from her and on her altars alone was it his simple and single duty to immolate himself and his belongings. As against her imperious rule, he had no right, no excuse, no justification. Her bounden slave when he presumed to lift his hand in menace against her majesty, his act was sacrilege—an unpardonable infamy—a defiance of fate and omnipotence. Here was a great subject for a tragedy under any other conception than the Roman. Any possible extenuation of the rebellion of Coriolanus, on the ground of the State's ingratitude, would have left room in the imagination for sympathy and justification and so furnished a ground for tragedy. But in the Roman conception, the State's ingratitude gave no excuse for resentment in the heart of the citizen; Rome gave him all and legitimately demanded all from him. No Roman audience

could extenuate or sympathize with the one crime in the Roman code and no Roman could conceive its delineation as a proper subject for the public stage; no Roman imagination picture it as a fit theme for presentation to a Roman audience.

When tragedy did manifest itself amongst the Romans, it came by way of importation from Greece and was Greek in style, theme and subject.* Alien in its nature, both in thought and manner, to the constitution of the Roman mind, it took no root in Roman soil and soon withered away.

The same spirit that had excluded tragedy was equally fatal to the epic. It was not until the Greek influence had made its way to Rome that the Roman imagination felt the inspiration of epic song. But here as in tragedy, and for the same reasons, Rome had no voice of her own—she simply echoed the muse of Greece and followed her models. Navius and Ennius made epic imitations. They wrote annals in crude verse, without unity and without life. Not until the Æneid

* F. Schlegel, "History of Literature" and A. Schlegel, "Essays on Dramatic Literature."

of Virgil did Rome produce a poem with shadow of a claim to epic dignity, and this was modeled upon the Greek Homer, resembling the Greek epic as a rose in wax does the natural flower.

In the distinction between the Iliad and the Æneid lies the vast difference between the literary genius of Greece and Rome. The Hellenic nationality, it might be said, was founded on the Homeric poems. They sprang like limpid fountain-heads from the very beginnings of Greek life and poured their generous floods down into the national life, fertilizing, enriching and ripening the Hellenic spirit into blossom and into fruit. Homer was the Nile of Greek literature, innundating its entire area and depositing the rich silt which made its soil bear a hundredfold.* Out of the Homeric poems ripened the spirit of Greek nationality. They were the moral bond of Hellenic unity, the sympathetic link of confederation. They moulded the Greek mind to the same religious ideas, the same traditional sympathies, and were the common inheritance of the various

* See De Quincey on "Homer and the Homeridæ."

tribes and the common factor which furnished a general type amidst many differences. They were the fresh and exuberant utterance of a vigorous and original national spirit; they welled up from the very heart of an unquestioning faith and possessed all its simplicity. They were a living source with power to make live. They came in the beginnings of Hellenic life and remained the perennial treasure-house of its literature, the deposit of its religious faith and the universal inspiration of the national life.

The Æneid came eight centuries after the founding of Rome, at the meridian of Rome's greatness, when the world lay at the feet of the Roman imperium and the Roman wolf had fattened itself to repletion on the dead nations. It came after Roman institutions had departed from the pristine integrity of their purpose, after the poison of the putrescence, which Rome had imbibed from the dead nations about her, had spread its leprosy through the wolf's veins. Rome had indeed risen to the pinnacle of her power. Her sway was universal, her duration seemed to be of endless promise, but she had reached

the limits of her possibilities. The prime of her power was the beginning of its waning. The Æneid drew no inspiration from the interior spirit of a living national life. It did not rise from the exigency of a people to utter themselves in a great national poem. Rome was too busily occupied in dividing the spoils of the conquered peoples to feel the inspiration of exalted song; she never had a soul seeking the freedom of utterance in the human word, and in the day of her corruption was not likely to find the exaltation of its spirit. But as she had imitated Greek manners, so had she imitated Greek utterance; she had learned the art of rhetoric, and in the mimicry of rhetoric she produced a Latin epic after the Homeric model.

The Æneid was an artifice; it drew nothing from Roman life. The lachrymose Æneas does not possess even the first element of Roman virtue, virility. The stern integrity of the Roman character could never have sprung from the loins of this tearful marionet. The spontaneous power of the old Homeric simplicity is not found in the Æneid, for rhetoric has no power of spontaneity. The tears of

Achilles over Patroclus are a manly virile grief swelling from the heart in sorrow and rage over the loss of a beloved friend.* The tears of Æneas, when he bemoans the heavy hand of fate and the loss of Dido, are the effusion of an effeminate softness, an artifice of grief, a sorrow that might be wiped away with the tender application of a lace handkerchief. He is not a Roman, but a decadent Greek; a mere parody of heroism. Rome had no power of epic utterance because she had no thought of freedom; she understood the mechanical rules of speech, and she adopted by instinct the Greek rhetoric, and Greek rhetoric was the decadence of Greek literature, the artificial utterance of the genius that once sang nobly in the resonant simplicity of Homer's line, thundered in the grandeur of the lofty verse of Æschylus and rose to the glowing serenity of harmony in the perfect poise of Sophocles. Rome learned Greek rhetoric but she had no power of assimilating the living spirit of Hellenic utterance. Her dramatists imitated Æschylus and Sophocles, and Virgil modeled the Æneid upon the Iliad, but the power of

* Hello, "L'Homme," Book III., L'Art.

living speech was not given to them. Their rhetoric was the artifice of Dædalus, not the tense wing of the living bird cleaving the empyrean of sublimest song.

As the Æneid was constructed by artifice, having no roots in the national spirit, so it had no power of life for the future. The Homeric poems were a formative power in Hellenic life; they were the sap in the tree of Greek nationality. The Æneid drew nothing from Roman life and contributed nothing to it. Subsequent to Virgil Roman history made and unmade itself as indifferently to the influence of the Æneid as if it had never been written. It was a closet poem and had no vital relation to the Roman people and could have had none. Literature draws its sustenance from the life of the time. It may indeed represent the past, but to be vital it must mirror that past in the life of the present. The Æneid was builded on an alien model; its theme was a legend which had died out of popular credence in Virgil's day under the fatal influence of the prevalent skepticism. It lacked the vital soul of belief; the myth had come to be regarded as a mere

poetic artifice. It pictured neither the life of the past nor struck a responsive chord in the Roman heart of its own day, and consequently its influence fell sterile in the future.

But withal there was in Roman literature one note peculiarly its own ; though a literature of imitation and rhetoric it possessed one characteristic and original quality, and that was a quality of majesty which redeems it in some measure from the degradation of mere imitation. It always manifested an exalted sense of the majesty of eternal Rome. The tremendous destiny of the Roman people throughout perpetual time ever sounded like a trumpet note in all its utterances. Cicero, though preeminently the rhetorician, ever holds up this notion as his ideal, and in its inspiration gives freshness and nobility to the obvious artificiality of his polished and carefully balanced sentences. Even Ovid, whose verse was in large measure a fetid exotic, feels the vigorous virtue of that ideal and sometimes sings noble lines under the vital impulse of its afflatus. Horace, even in his bibulous moments, remembers it, and under the gift of its exaltation sometimes transcends the

frivolity of the occasion and strikes a nobler chord. But after Tacitus, even that one solitary ideal disappears from the pages of Roman writings or is overwhelmed in the flood of abject adulation and petty trifles which henceforth sweeps the channels of a completely decayed literature.

In the meantime a new Word has been spoken among men, a Word that was spoken in deed and in truth, a Word that lived its sacred utterance amongst men, and with this new Word came a new life to the heart of man and a new light to his intellect. Before the new Word the majesty of Rome was the breath of a moment, a vain power and the dust of empire. With that new Word were to come new tongues to men, a new and a marvellous power of utterance, glad with the tiding of a new truth and fecund with a new life. The Eternal Word was made manifest to men, and He was the light and the life of men. From the military despotism of pagan Rome mankind was about to pass to the spiritual domination of Christian Rome.

THE TRANSITION.

When Horace staked his fame upon the eternity of Rome, who of his generation could have gainsaid his trust? It was the hey-day of Roman greatness. The Roman majesterium extended to the limits of the known world. The nations lay submissive under her yoke. Supreme and without a rival Cæsar from the banks of the Tiber governed to the utmost limits of the civilized earth. Against the mandates of his imperial will was no escape. The fugitive from his wrath found his vengeance alike in the deserts of the far east and amidst the tangled forests of the Danube. On the frontier of the Empire, which were the confines of civilization, the Roman legionaries stood guard over the vast populations that enjoyed the majesty of the Roman peace. From Rome radiated the great roads that led like huge arteries carrying power from the heart to the remotest parts

of the swarming empire. Along them flowed the tribute and the wealth of the nations to the imperial city, rising in gleaming marble on its seven hills, rich in stately temple, luxurious palace and voluptuous garden. The seat of universal empire, Rome was the commercial, the moral and the intellectual center of the world. The dream of her ambition from the beginning was fulfilled. From the heights of supreme power she ruled the world, dispensing Roman justice to the subservient peoples, the mistress of their fortunes, the enthroned fate that held life and death in her sceptered hand. What rival had she to fear, what possible foe was left in all the broad regions of the earth to cope with? She stood supreme, sovereign, dominant, alone.

To the Roman mind, in truth, might she seem eternal, and to the conquered nations around about her, invincible and omnipotent. Yet the spring of her power had reached its utmost expansion. The moment of her supremest might was the instant of her decline.* The force that made her was then beginning to lose its energy; the great machine to wear

* Cf. De Quincey on "Phil. of Roman History."

out. The hard tooth of time was knawing even on that iron frame. Mechanical in its nature, there was no vital principle within its massive bulk to renew and rebuild the ancient structure. Life can resist decay and regenerate the vital frame when its powers are wasted; but there is no power to renew worn out machinery, and the Roman machine was beginning to crumble. For the first eight centuries of her existence, her energy had been expanding indomitably; century after century she had gathered the nations under her imperium; her appetite for conquest was insatiable, growing with what it fed upon. She was the great wolf of the ancient world, devouring the dead peoples, feeding upon the corrupted body of Adam as it came down the ages under the deadly effects of the primal sin. When her vast powers were concentrated into the single hand of an imperial master, she had reached the limits of her expansion. Within the confines of civilization there were no victims left for the wolf; beyond those confines was an unknown region of barbarism, the spoils of which were not worth the seeking. Henceforth the appetite of the Roman

wolf was to be turned upon herself. Having nothing else to devour she must needs feed upon her own corrupted body. For the first eight centuries of her existence she had lived by preying upon others, for the last four she was to live on the repletion of her own body, and sunk in the torpor of her own gluttony slowly died out of the world.

Never in the long course of her career had she possessed the true spirit of literature, for she never understood the power of the freedom of the human word.* For the first six centuries she had never so much as uttered herself in human speech. She went about crunching the bones of the dead nations like a dumb beast; she first learned the uses of the human word from one of her victims and forthwith began to imitate the human word as Greece had uttered it. In imitation she excelled, because she understood perhaps better than any other ancient people the power of the formula, the application of the rule in construction. Then rose the palmy days of her literature, not by virtue of any creative

*See section on Style in "Philosophy of Literature" for meaning of freedom of speech.

power, which alone produces a living utterance, but by virtue of her mastery of the formula, by her extraordinary power of artifice. There had been but one note of originality in her utterance and that was the resonant echo of the eternal majesty of Roman power. For two centuries she constructed a literature of rhetoric and then her power of imitation declined. When her political fabric began to crumble, the artificial vigor of her literature relaxed. Soon after the Augustan era Roman literature began to sink into decrepitude. It lost even its one redeeming trait; it ceased to echo the majesty of the Roman imperium. In its best days even its artifice was vigorous; there was a certain power in it though mechanical. But when the period of decline set in, with one or two rare exceptions, it became querulous, petty, puerile and obscene.

The chief dignity of Roman literature was manifest in the work of her historians. There, more capaciously than anywhere else, did the Roman mind show forth the immense majesty of the Roman imperium. But after Tacitus, whose utterance was the largest and

the noblest in the records of Roman literature, history in Roman hands becomes a contemptible species of gossip. It degenerates into mere anecdotage.* No longer concerned with the mighty progress of the Roman power marching to the conquest of the world, with those wider and larger interests that touch the heart of empire and the fate of nations; descending from the lofty eerie, whence the Roman eagle looked out upon the vast regions of the conquered world, it became absorbed with the minutest details of daily life and assoiled with the abject record of the grossest vices. The virility of the Roman mind was lost; it became flaccid, servile, puerile, and had so far fallen away from its pristine dignity as to be content to dedicate itself to the service of adulation or to pander to lechery. After the time of Trajan the night of its literature closes in.† Rome becomes the prey of the barbarism which seethed in her own entrails. It was not until she had been internally disintegrated by the forces of her own corruption that the barbarians from without

* Cf De Quincey on "Philosophy of Roman History."
† Cf F. Schlegel, "History of Literature."

burst through the ring-fence of her legions and battered the crumbling mass into ruins.

Meantime within the dying empire was germinating a new principle of vitality, one that was to supplant the ancient failure and renew mankind. It was not destined to rejuvenate the Roman polity. Rome had fulfilled her career, and summed up in her dissolution was the culmination of heathenism. She had gathered the nations under her imperium to perish with them. She had welded them into a mechanical unity which was to prepare the way for the organic unity of the life to come. In the new order, not only was the old order to be displaced, but human nature to be made anew. The restoration of man was to be radical. His failure in heathenism had its roots in the sin of Adam. The deadly fruits of that sin had been manifested in heathenism in its entire religious, social and civic life. Regeneration was not the vitalizing of the institutions of heathenism, for they were in death and of death. Rome was their term and, closed in her, they were to go down to the grave forever. Out of the new order springing

from the new life was to grow a new literature, as radically different from the ancient literature as the new life from the ancient death.

To appreciate that difference, let us dwell for a moment upon man in the old order as he lived in the days of the Roman imperium. What were the foundations of his domestic and civic life when the new life, as yet obscure and humble, first appeared in the old world?

The Roman State was the pagan consummation of all human living. The individual, the family and the nations were sacrificed to that one end. All rights, duties, privileges were merged into that one devouring idea. The worship of the majesty of Rome was the only sanctity. The civic order began and ended in the absolute State, and the social and the domestic orders were completely over-shadowed and swallowed up in this abyss of despotism. Domestic life in human paganism was founded on slavery.* All domestic service was performed by slaves; manual labor was the portion of slaves, even the arts and

* "Allies' Formation of Christendom," Part I.

professions were consigned to their skill and their care. Labor of any kind was beneath the dignity of the Roman citizen, and the vast majority of the population were slaves serving their masters, not only by toil of their hands, but with the power of the mind and by the abasement of their moral natures, completely subservient to the lust and the ambitions of their tyrants.* In the conception of Rome the slave was catalogued as mere property, a thing, a chattel. He could be disposed as property; his life and his death were absolutely in the hands of the master; the uses of his body and his mind belonged to his master without reserve. The complete degradation of human nature under such a system was inevitable. Abject, hopeless, dissolute, the misery of the Roman slave nowhere found a ray of solace or assuagement under that iron despotism, which refused to recognize any vestige of humanity in this living chattel. Not only, however, was the slave population of the empire without hope and without solace, but the master in his turn fell under a

*In "Quo Vadis," Sienkiewicz renders a faithful though imaginary picture of Roman slavery.

despotism as crushing and as merciless. The hand of Cæsar lay as heavily upon the master of a thousand slaves as did the master's on the breathing chattel that did his vilest bidding. Neither for master nor for slave was there hope of escape against the will above them. When Cæsar so decreed, the liberty of opening his veins in a warm bath was the only choice left to the master. The sole difference between him and his slave was the selection of the mode of death. When death came to either, the be-all and the end-all came with it. Faith in the hereafter was dead in the heart of heathen man, hope in a future life had utterly perished in his withered soul. Knowledge of God or His providence had faded from his corrupted mind. He either timidly indulges in a pitiful doubt like Tacitus or takes refuge in the mournful pantheism of Marcus Aurelius.* In Marcus Aurelius hear heathenism at its best and wisest uttering its gospel of despair. He says of man: "What was yesterday a little mucus to-morrow will be a mummy or ashes. Pass

* In Tacitus' "Life of Agricola" the concluding paragraph beginning "Si quis piorum manibus locus, etc.," shows us the state of the Roman mind in its best and worthiest.

then through this little space of time conformably to nature, and end thy journey in content.....How small a part of the boundless and unfathomable time is assigned to every man, for it is very soon swallowed up in the eternal. And how small a part of the whole substance. And how small a part of the universal soul. And on what a small clod of the whole earth thou creepest. Reflecting on all this, consider nothing to be great, except to act as thy nature leads thee, and to endure that which the common nature brings."

Such was the gospel of despair which heathenism, speaking from the lips of its greatest and its wisest, offered to slave and master, a gospel not of light but an evangel of darkness, of ignorance and of fear. For stoicism was not the virtue of heroic strength; it was rather the means which pride employed to escape the abasement of the times by a passive endurance of its evils. It submitted to the injustice and the abject conditions, which the despotism of paganism had thrust upon human nature, under the plea of fate. But it was in fact a species of moral cowardice,

fearful to actively resist the malice of the age and resorting to a passive endurance under the delusion that it was practicing heroic virtue. It was the refuge of the few who aspired to the philosophic mind and saw no escape from the stygian iniquity of the times save in the shortness of human life, and when the burden grew beyond the strength of stoic stolidity, pointed out the open door of escape recommended by Marcus Aurelius, the way of exit by suicide.

For the many, not a stoic hardness of submission, but an epicurean softness of acquiescence was the rule of life. To accept the iniquity and be the iniquity was both more agreeable and more natural to pagan man than the cold reticence of the stoic parody of virtue. The body of Adam was thoroughly corrupted; through long generations it had turned away from God, forgotten its Maker and so lost all recognition of its own moral worth. It was given up to all dissoluteness and abominations. The consummation of heathenism in Roman civilization and the degradation of human nature in that sink of corruption, as a punishment for its repeated

turning away from God, is fearfully described by the great Apostle of the Gentiles. After telling us how from the beginning the invisible things of God are plainly seen from the visible and how heathen man without excuse had turned from that knowledge, he declares :* "For this cause God delivered them over to the desires of their heart, to uncleanness, so that they dishonored their own bodies in themselves; who changed God's truth into falsehood, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator. Wherefore God delivered them over to ignominious passions : for their women changed their natural use to that which is against nature : and likewise their males. And as they thought good not to retain God in their knowledge, God delivered them up to a reprobate mind, to do what was not fitting : full of all injustice, malice, fornication, avarice, wickedness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, hated of God, insolent, proud, puffed up, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, unwise, covenant breakers, without natural affection,

* Romans, I., 18-32.

implacable, unmerciful, who, knowing the justice of God, understood not that they who do such things are worthy of death, and not only they who do them, but they who consent with those who do them." This is imperial Rome, and in Rome the iniquitous fullness of heathenism, the depths of whose turpitude are indicated by Cicero in his invectives against Catiline and his followers, the Rome which Tacitus mourns and Juvenal lashes. But neither Cicero, nor Tacitus nor Juvenal saw the true root of all that foulness, nor measured nor estimated the abyss of darkness whence it sprang. Their eyes were filled with but one possible disaster, by which they gauged the moral attitude of Rome, and that was the threatened civic integrity of the Roman State. Vice at bottom had no meaning for them save as it affected the interests of eternal Rome and became an alienation from this basic conception of civic virtue. It was in this sink of iniquity, described by St. Paul, that the populations of paganism battened and rotted. They were delivered up to all uncleanness, perverting the natural body to unnatural uses, because they had turned

from the knowledge of God and knew not their own souls: Adam's body corrupted and corrupting, the Roman wolf replete with the putrescence of the dead nations.

In this corrupted body the living seed of regeneration was sown. The new life was not to restore old Rome, but to build up a new Rome, a universal and eternal city in truth and in life, of which the Rome of Romulus was but a mechanical foreshadowing in the order of Providence. The new city was to be built on the restored knowledge of God and of the human soul, and out of this new order of knowledge was to spring the regeneration of mankind, not only of the nations that lay dead within the periphery of the perishing empire, but those vast multitudes in the cimmerian regions beyond, against whose intrusion the Roman world had cordoned a ring-fence of mailed legions. Within the new polity barbarian was equally included with Roman citizen, and stranger still and inexplicable to the Roman mind, the slave, the despised creature on whose laboring back the whole weight of Roman civilization lay crushing, was to be received with fraternal embrace

and accorded all the rights and privileges and honors of the freeman! What a tremendous swinging away from the poles of the Roman mind! What a cataclysmic reversion of the currents of Roman habits, manners, customs! What a complete uprooting and reconstruction of the domestic and civil society of paganism, which had founded itself on the conception of the supremacy of the State and the cancellation of individual rights!

The new principle of life was to enter into the corrupted body of Adam, raising it revivified from the grave in which its sin had buried it; and that body, so long the abode of all uncleanness and foulness, in the new order becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost, the home of sanctity and purity. In the new teaching man is not a little mucus and to-morrow a mummy or ashes, but a rational soul with an immortal destiny before it, whose resurrected body was to participate in that incorruptible life hereafter. God was not an impersonal world soul, a mere principle of vitality in which all things shared and into which all were again

merged, without distinction at death, but the Personal, Infinite and Eternal Creator and Governor of the universe, and the universe the creature of the power of His Word, who brought forth all things from nothing. Here was a change by the whole periphery of being from the gross pantheism of heathenism. Pagan man had lost the idea of personality, both of divine and human personality, and with this ignorance followed the extinction of the notion of responsibility. All moral action had ultimately resolved itself into the barren mystery of fate—the inexorable power which drove all things blindly to their term. Here was no room for freedom and, therefore, no room for responsibility. Stoicism and epicureanism both reflected or rather concentrated this impotency of pagan morality. The Stoics accepted the unavoidable decree of this eyeless necessity with a passive indifferentism, alleging that in the final result there was no distinction of things or deeds. The Epicureans, who may be classed as the mass of paganism, fled from the contemplation of the fatal power that emmeshed humanity and sought escape in the oblivious

moments of sensuality.* The doctrine of the new dispensation like a lightning bolt rived the darkness that had settled upon the despairing mind of pagan man. Not a blind fate, but an infinitely wise God ruled the universe; not an inexorable power, but a merciful Father, whose providence, not only encompassed the great but extended to the minutest things, was in the perfection of His infinite wisdom and in the unfathomable depths of His infinite charity, leading man back by the path of love to the freedom of the sons of God. Man was a rational personality to whom his Maker, also a rational Person, spoke in knowledge and wisdom and power of the way of salvation. Every thought, every word, every deed of man was measured and weighed under the eternal eye of his Creator; every hair of his head was numbered and, in the scale of being, not a sparrow fell but it was noted in the Divine account. The illuminating fire of the new doctrine was to penetrate into every recess of the heart and mind of man, to search out the dark places and pour the revivifying

* Whether that sensuality be licentious or temperate.

power of its light into the abysses which hid the monster of sin and to reveal man to himself, as the creature of Divine Love, from whose warm embrace he had perversely strayed. The State—the great machine of despotism—was not the end of man's living, nor wealth, nor power, nor aught that passed with the vicissitudes of the earth, but the eternal possession of Infinite Good by the purified and righteous will; nor was the human person lost in this perfect communion with the Eternal Good, but, distinct and whole within his own rational nature, he forever achieved an unalloyed and complete happiness by participation of the Divine goodness—the source of his being and the term of his perfection.

Apply this new teaching to that creature upon whom, above all, the yoke of paganism lay most oppressively, to that living chattel whose mind and body were absolutely his master's property. The new doctrine placed him upon a throne more exalted than Cæsar's, clothed him with a dignity greater than the pomp of all earth's potentates, valued him beyond all riches. Though the bond of his

legal servitude temporarily remained, he was spiritually emancipated; he no longer belonged to his Roman master, body and soul; he was no longer a mere chattel, but a human person, whose spiritual destiny was as great a concern as his master's. He has rights, and eternal rights; a Roman slave has rights and these rights his master is bound to grant and respect as he values his own eternal destiny! Not even his body is the mere instrument of his master's will, for that body belongs to his person and partakes of the rational dignity, and enjoys, moreover, the promise of sharing in the eternal incorruptibility of the immortal spirit. What a burst of light into the darkest regions of heathenism! That nethermost abyss of degradation illuminated like noonday, a wilderness of sand and thorn made to blossom like a garden, hope and faith and love burgeoning into sudden fruit, where before the dust and ashes of a sensual despair strewed the wastes of human life.

Here in truth was a new doctrine in an old world, perishing by its own inanition. Had the full force of this new doctrine fallen like a thunderbolt from heaven on the Roman

world, it would have shivered the brittle empire of the Cæsars like a globe of fragile glass. But the new dispensation did not come by force and arms; it came into the world by way of humility and love, and the way of its coming was as marvellous as the supernatural power which brought it. It came not to sit on the throne of the Cæsars, but to reign in the hearts of men. Like the waters of heaven it fell upon the parched earth and percolated downward to give life and vigor at the roots of humanity. Pride had devoured the soul of heathen man. The new teaching made humility the keystone of its virtues; heathenism had made the slave the footstool of its passions and its power; the new teaching made the slave the peer of his master and bound them together in a spiritual brotherhood, whose common equality found no room for distinction except in virtue, wherein indeed the slave might excel the master. Here in fact was a menace to the empire of the Cæsars, because that empire was built upon the eminence of human pride, founded upon the slavery, not only of the bodies, but of the souls of man. Paganism was the term

of the corruption of the body of Adam, the consummation of its degeneration. The new teaching was to be the regeneration of Adam's body by the emancipation of the souls of men and the bodies of men. In the new order even the bodies of men were to be made holy, temples of the Spirit of God.

Bondage had been the order of the old, freedom was to be the order of the new life. The knowledge of God and the knowledge of their own souls was to make men free. Regeneration was to be brought about, not by disputing Cæsar's sovereignty over a dead world, but by making the dead world live, and by virtue of the new life displace the empire of death, whence alone Cæsar derived his false title. The ancient world, dead in the corruption of the old Adam, could only be revived by the eternal life of the new Adam, the members of whose body partake of His life. Regeneration was not by way of the body politic or social, but by way of the application of the new life through the individual. The regeneration of individual man was the way of the new dispensation, because the individual soul alone was of immortal

value; the State, society, the family, were perishable institutions, whose beginning and end were in time and for time. Regeneration was applicable to human institutions through its effects in the individual soul. The primary value is in the individual soul, the secondary and derived value in the institution through the fruits of regeneration in the individual. Paganism had reversed the true order, making the State primary, the individual secondary, and in this subordination of the individual had not only lost the true conception of his dignity and his nature, but had cancelled his personality in a grinding system of bodily and mental slavery that levelled him to the category of mere property, lower in the scale of being than the brute. Yet in the individual was the true value and the real right, forgotten by heathenism, ignored, sunk in the sloughs of the vilest institution of slavery the world has ever witnessed. The work of regeneration must therefore take place in the individual. The regeneration of the individual would work out the emancipation both of soul and body.

The revelation of the nature of God and

of the human soul was to be the force-making for the reconstruction of human society. But this was not all. With this great illumination came a twofold and ever intenser light. God on the one hand, and His creature the human soul on the other, was not the sum of the new dispensation, but God in the flesh, God here and now dwelling amongst us, and human nature raised to a participation in the divine life of this incarnate God. Consider the depths of the wisdom and love of the divine plan. Not only are men the children in the order of creation of the eternal Father destined* to an immortal life with Him hereafter, but God Himself has become man and added to the bond of paternity the tie of brotherhood! And this mystery of love, ever growing profounder and more illustrious, God, our Brother, voluntarily assumes the penalty of the sins of Adam's corrupted body and expiates them by the shameful death of the cross, quickening that body into life by the infinite virtue of His inestimable sacrifice! Could love do more? See how in that wonderous revelation and its actual consummation

* So destined under the supernatural dispensation of grace.

light shines within light! Love is consumed by love again! Not only does He become the precious victim of our sins and the bloody holocaust of redemption on Calvary, but perpetuates that eternal sacrifice in an unbloody manner throughout all time in the institution of the Eucharistic sacrifice, and then not content with the manifestation of a love that would to human eyes seem exhausted, He gives, in what would seem the very abandonment of love, His own divine body and blood to be the food and drink of the souls and bodies of men, and lifts human nature, even upon earth, to divine communion with Himself, He abiding within man and man in Him. Here, it would seem, is love gone mad! Here is the wisdom of the world confounded; human pride, on which heathenism builded its house of sensualism, shattered from center to circumference. Here all human conception of the divine is so absolutely transcended that the notion of divinity, which paganism entertained, seems inverted and parodied. So low does God here stoop in humility, that the pride of the world cannot penetrate the infinite abyss of that unsoundable love. So abased in pride

has fallen the rebellious creature, that from the depths of his degradation he cannot conceive the glorious heights of that divine humility, which only the God of an infinite love could achieve.

Such were the tremendous manifestations of God's immeasurable scheme of redemption, which came in the fullness of time, when Adam's body had run the term of its corruption. Man in the bondage of paganism had forgotten the unity and the personality of God. In Christ they were revealed to him. And not only was his ignorance on these points dispelled, but he was furthermore illuminated and strengthened by the teachings of the incarnation of God as redeeming him, glorifying him and becoming his very food. In this, the central doctrine, the fountain-head, rose as from the foundation the other sacramental institutions, which were to encompass and complete his life in grace from birth to death. By the waters of baptism he was to be made to live again in the body of the new Adam, by confession to be forgiven and absolved from sin when he fell, by confirmation strengthened in grace, by matrimony

sanctified in the family life, by holy orders empowered to dispense the gifts of the new order, by extreme unction strengthened and sanctified in his passage from this world to the other. Not only in the new order was his mind illuminated by the teaching of the eternal truths, but through the sacramental institutions was a divine strength and santification infused into his will that he might persevere in its virtues. The new dispensation sanctified him from the cradle to the grave, penetrated his heart every moment of his existence, fortified his will and illuminated his conscience in every act of his life. Faith, hope and charity were the ethical grounds of his new life; humility was to be the staff of his walking; patience his shield and purity the eye of his soul. His body was bought with a price, the infinite price of the eternal sacrifice, fed with the food of angels, and became the temple of the Holy Ghost; therefore to be kept clean and pure and free from all assoil of the flesh, the tem perate, chaste and holy abode of divine love. This was the body of the new Adam, regenerated from the blasted and corrupted body

of the old Adam, from that body so powerfully described in the abyss of its degradation by the Apostle of the Gentiles.

In this new order human nature was to arise invigorated and regenerated, both in the social and the political world. There was to be a recasting of the fundamental notions of human society and government. The ancient fabric could not fulfill the uses of the new life; it had been elaborated from the pagan idea of man and was to fall with the passing of the old ideal. When Christianity came into the world that old order was slowly exhausting itself. For four centuries the disintegration of the Roman world went on, while the leaven of the new order was gradually working through the body social and the body politic. It met with many oppositions, buffeting it and beating it back in the temporalities of things, but in reality secretly and providentially contributing to its final triumph. In the intellectual world it met with the entire philosophy of paganism to dispute its way and contest its supremacy. While the Roman State persecuted and martyred, pagan philosophy assaulted the new teaching with all the

weapons at its command. It employed all the subtle ingenuity of the Greek mind to undermine the new doctrine in the intellectual world. All the force of the schools of Aristotle, Plato, Zeno and Epicurus, was brought to bear against the new knowledge. On the practical side, as a substitute for the new faith, Persian creeds were introduced and engrafted upon some fragment of Christian revelation in order to make confusion and division.

But neither the dualism of Persia nor the philosophy of Greece had anything new to offer to an old world, nor could they point out the way of escape from the valley of death into which mankind had wandered. The dualism of Persia but emphasized and perpetuated the dark problem of evil and death, and steeped the soul in the superstitions of its magic and confounded the mind in the endless labyrinth of its æonic systems. Pagan philosophy taught a hard and severe pantheism, which engulfed both human and divine liberty and destroyed responsibility. Amongst the unreflecting many, an epicurean indulgence of the appetites became the practical

rule of living; amongst the thinking few, stoicism became the philosophic belief. Stoicism, notwithstanding its poetic expression, had reduced the universe, including man, to mere matter and force. Although it spoke of God as the ruling power of the world, that which it called God was simply a force pervading matter. Matter is the only reality; the two chief principles of things are matter and force, matter formless and motionless, the passive principle; force the active and the forming principles, everywhere penetrating and informing matter and indivisibly joined with matter; the operating force in the whole world is the Godhead. When the Stoics speak of the world-soul, world-reason, nature, universal law, providence, fate, they mean the one primal force, determining everything with absolute regularity, interpenetrating the whole world (7 Eterweg, I, p. 195—Oeller, Vol. III., pp. 130, 131; see also pp. 126–131).* Epictetus, the most illustrious of the Stoic philosophers under the Cæsars, in answer to his followers, who protest that they can no longer bear the bondage of the

* Quoted by Allies, "Formation of Christendom," Part I.

wretched body, bids those who are anxious for release to wait for god: "When he gives the signal and releases you from this service, then depart to him." But what is this god on whose bidding the stoic bids the wretched wait, and to what will he call them? Here is the answer of Epictetus: "When god (*i. e.* nature) gives you what is needful, he sounds the recall, he opens the door and bids you come! Whither? To nothing dreadful. To that from which thou camest, to the friendly and the cognate, to the elements. What was in thee of fire departs to fire; what was in thee of earth, to earth; what of breath, to breath; what of water, to water. There is no Hades or Acheron, no river of wail or of fire. But all things are full of gods and genii."* This is the final word of paganism to unregenerate man, to the old Adam corrupted and dying of his sin. To the miserable slave, whose wretched body bears the hideous marks of his own and his master's sin, and whose still more wretched soul is sunk hopelessly in the abyss of abomination, such is the final word of the consum-

* Quoted by Allies, "Formation of Christendom," Part I.

mated wisdom of heathenism: Endure your misery for yet a little while, with the patience of despair, until it at last sinks into the oblivious night of death, where the elements, of which alone you are compounded, are resolved back into the forgetful bosom of nature.

There is no remedy offered in this sterile creed to man, moral, spiritual, social or political; it simply proclaims the acceptance of the inevitable working of nature's irreversible law of suffering, with the promise of surcease when the exhausted frame of the human body drops back into its original dust. A little mucus to-day, the imperial stoic averred, and to-morrow a mummy or ashes. Yet mankind lay visibly under a mountain of sorrow: Marcus Aurelius himself perpetually declares and witnesses to the misery of man. Stoicism itself is a constant and radical attestation of the awful realization of the misery of living in the attempt at escape by way of a philosophical resignation to the evils which beset human nature from the cradle to the grave.

The body of Adam lay corrupting in the steaming valleys of sense. In the picture

given us by the Apostle, "God had delivered men over to the desires of their heart, to uncleanness.....had delivered them to a reprobate mind, to what was not fitting; full of all injustice, malice, fornication, avarice, wickedness, full of envy, murder, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, hated of God, insolent, proud, puffed-up, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, unwise, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful!" What barrier had heathen philosophy to stay this flood of corruption, what word of regeneration to leaven this seething mass of unrighteousness? Listen to Epictetus: "Endure all this for a little while, for to-morrow you die forever." Listen to Marcus Aurelius: "To-day only a little mucus, to-morrow a mummy or ashes." Was ever darkness made profounder by the shades of ignorance or the gloom of despair? Here was a vast system of empire conterminous with the civilized world, built upon a slavery of body and soul, a machinery of government groaning and creaking with its own overplus of weight, tottering and ready to bring the world to ruin in the crash of its

fall; from without a menace of chaos from the impending hordes of barbarism ringing the empire, dissolution working within its own body and members, all security of life and property and honor dependent upon the arbitrary whim of a despotic ruler, who was himself not safe from the assassin's dagger in the secret chambers of his palace, or in the midst of his armed cohorts, a slave ruling and yet ruled by slaves; a horror of fear and uncertainty in governor and governed; instability in the head, fickleness in the members, society in the travail of disaster; the present a nameless terror, the future a blank—and the only word of relief that the consummated wisdom of heathenism can offer to distracted humanity: Cultivate an equanimity of despair in the bitter prospect of eternal death! Yet this same heathenism without hope of salvation in itself, darker than blackest night, surcharged with disease, death and despair, dared assail with the barren word of its baffled philosophy the new teaching replete with love, light and life, hope, peace and immortality! Against the Word of Life the word of death arrayed itself in the pride of defeated

reason; and in the person of the apostate Julian spent its exhausted force in one last violent effort to crush the Divine Word, fructifying the human heart in charity and illuminating the mind of man in wisdom.

Sin had corrupted the heart and darkened the understanding; the new teaching was to purify the heart and enlighten the understanding. When it penetrated the life of man in all its practical details and divinely energized his entire being in the exercise of all his bodily and moral powers, it also threw its light into those speculative regions where the human intellect had so long and vainly reached out to comprehend the mysteries that shut in its narrow capacities. The philosophy of the Incarnation came to complete and to illuminate the philosophy of the unassisted human reason. The Divine Word came to enlighten the human word, which had spoken a vain thing in the darkness of the reprobate mind.

While the literature of the ancient world ran to seed in the petty rhetoric of the crumbling empire and in the gloom of its stoicism, the divine foundations of the literature of the

new order were being carved out of the living rock of the Incarnation. Its foundation was the Divine Book, giving the history of the Incarnation and of the Incarnate Word and the redemption of the race by virtue of His Divine Passion, and the building up and establishment of the Body of the new Adam, under the perpetual guidance of the Paraclete, who is to abide with it always. Then followed the explication and defense of the new doctrine by the great Fathers. The point of illumination was ever the Divine-Human nature of Jesus Christ, which was the center of the idea of God, which the new revelation poured in upon the darkened understanding in a sevenfold ray:* God as One, God as Person, God as Father, God as Incarnate, God as the Food of man, God as Redeemer, and God as glorifying man in the eternal reward of beatitude. This was the body of truth about which the Divine science of the Fathers elaborated its tremendous literature. It was both an exposition and a defense. It first set forth and expounded the eternal truths and then defended them from the misconcep-

* Allies' "Formation of Christendom," Part I.

tions which their enemies had made current, as well as against the efforts of philosophic heathenism to dislodge them and to substitute its own sterile doctrines for them. It was not so much a literature of the *Belles-Lettres* as a literature of the scientific exposition of the first principles of the eternal truths, which made the profound and broad foundations of the new dispensation.

Its effort and its purpose was to plant in the minds of men the principles of supernatural truth and prepare the ground for the harvest to come, when regenerated human nature should have conceived the universe in the light of the supernaturalized human word, when the human word should have been reconciled with the Divine Word in the perfection of Christian philosophy. It was the labor of the quarry, the cutting and the shaping of the stones which were to be fit'ed into the temple of Christian science. Not until the leaven of regeneration had spread throughout human society, remoulding it, and man had learned himself anew in the knowledge of his true relation to God, would the power of the regenerated human word

manifesf itself in the art of literature. The old idea of man, the pagan view which had cancelled the notion of personality and abased the moral dignity of the soul, must first be purged from the mind, and the new conception of the eternal rights and destiny of the individual take stable lodgement there before the social and civil orders could be reconstructed on the principle of freedom, and the renewed human word find congenial soil and ample space to burgeon in the amplitude of its power and the fullness of its beauty.

THE MIDDLE AGES AND DANTE.

It is the common notion that the Roman empire fell under the blows of barbarian invaders. But external barbarism would never have been enabled to smash that mighty machine, if the internal barbarism of Rome had not already disjointed its huge members. Rome became the conflux of all heathenism, and her dissolution was the concentration of the decay of the ancient order. Barbarism is the antithesis of civilization, but it is not always necessarily outside of it. Lawlessness sometimes riots under the external forms of law. Savagery is ever a synonym for barbarism, but the most vicious corruption of the human heart may be found under the guise of the loftiest culture; the canker is often at the very heart of the rose. What completer depiction of the internal barbarism of imperial Rome than in that picture of it drawn by St. Paul, which was quoted in the last

chapter? A people given up to all injustice, malice and wickedness certainly could not be called a lawful people, whatsoever be the external form of their polity, the extent of their power or the material splendor of their imperium. These forces of destruction, these powers of evil could not fail in time to utterly disrupt even the external form of their polity and bring down the civic edifice in ruins.

We have seen that Rome, from the beginning, had been a people of conquest; the discipline of militarism had been the mainspring of her movement. When the ancient world lay vanquished at her feet, her energies drooped for lack of material on which to expend themselves. She was a piece of watchwork that had begun to run down—to lose its spring and destined to come to a dead stop. It was a vain undertaking to throw her power against the surgent masses of barbarism that belted her around; it was indeed to take up arms against a sea of troubles, to cleave the dividing wave that closed again behind the trenchant sword. Victory over the barbarians external to her was bootless; they had

no cities to pillage, no cultivated country to furnish supplies for the avarice of Rome, no fixed law of their own, which Rome, true to her love of the formula, might place as a yoke around their necks after the Roman fashion of enslaving a people by chains of their own forging. And the barbarians beyond the frontier, exempt from her power by virtue of their nomadism, waited on the verge of the empire to enter and take possession, when the barbarism within the limits should have rotted and undermined the foundations on which that crumbling structure rested.

When the time came, and to Roman eyes it seemed as if the fountains of the great deep had broken up, there arose another great witness to that internal barbarism, which had opened the sluice gates to the savage tide, pouring its devastating waters over the vast extent of the broken empire. When pagan Rome witnessed the appalling disaster of the invasion of Alaric and saw the imperial city in the hands of a barbarian conqueror, for the first time in a thousand years, it laid the charge of the calamity at the door of the Christians. Rome under the gods had prospered ; she had risen

to power and universal empire; then mistress of the world the subject nations lay at her feet; and now the barbarians sweep down upon her from all sides and dare violate the sanctity of the imperial city itself. She is become Christian, and she falls.

St. Augustine, in whose sanctified genius culminates the glory of patristic literature, rose up to vindicate the Faith, and gave to the world his great treatise *De Civitate Dei*, the first philosophy of history, wherein is set forth the solidarity of the human race and the unity of its career under the guidance of Providence.* It was the first comprehensive conception of a universal higher law governing the world and drawing good from its evil, out of disorder preparing for a higher order and leading the nations onward to the consummation of the Divine purpose in the regeneration of mankind by the Incarnation of the eternal Word. It was not the favor of the gods that had led Rome to universal empire, but the design of Divine Providence in preparation for the establishment of the

* Schlegel "History of Literature," and Allies' "Formation of Christendom."

universal dominion of the Kingdom of Christ. But obstinate adhesion to the abominations of pagan idolatry and its consequent corruption had disintegrated Roman life and left the empire the enfeebled prey of the invader. Here was the result of the abomination of paganism described by the Apostle; this was the effect of the interior barbarism which had blazed the way of destruction for the chastising arms of the barbarian from without. The City of God is a spiritual kingdom over against which lies the city of earth whose goods are all terrestrial and evanescent. The treasures of the Divine City are spiritual and eternal; it is to these that men should look; these men should seek; therein alone will they find consolation in the midst of the frightful calamities that are overwhelming them, fortitude against the evils of the times and the hope of that eternal felicity which the city of the earth can never give. Contrasting Tacitus with St. Augustine in their views of the course of history and the disasters of their respective ages, though the times of the Christian saint were far more calamitous in the material order than the days of

the pagan writer, we find in striking distinction the immense abyss that separates the Christian from the pagan conception of man and the world, and discover the great advance made by virtue of the sublime idea of the despised sect which Tacitus himself had so ignorantly calumniated three centuries before. "In the pagan, everything seems borne on by an iron fate, which tramples the free will of man, and overwhelms the virtuous before the wicked. In the Christian, order shines in the midst of destruction and mercy dispenses the severest humiliations. It was the symbol of the coming age. And so that great picture of the doctor, saint and philosopher laid hold of the minds of men during these centuries of violence which followed, and in which justice and peace, so far from embracing each other, seemed to have deserted the earth."*

This great work of St. Augustine stands out as the pinnacle of the literature of the great Fathers. In it is the summation of the doctrine of the Incarnation in its application to the history of the ancient world and at the

*Allies' "Formation of Christendom," page 80, Part I.

same time the philosophic and literary pharos of the ages to come, whose light shone out on the troubled waters of the four subsequent centuries in a blaze of illumination, where the darkness of the storm had gathered in the simulation of an endless night. The old heathenism was dying out of the world, spent and exhausted. It had brought man to the abyss and left him amidst the chaos of a falling world. Far from being a power of regeneration it had been the source of corruption and death. St. Augustine presented the new idea in a comprehensive philosophic form at a time when there was sore need of a speculative illumination of men's minds in the midst of the general ruin around about them. Rome had stood for all that is stable in the political order, and Rome was crumbling under their eyes like the unsubstantial vision of a dream. The barriers of her defense against the barbarian flood had been swept away like paper walls. That angry tide had roared against the very gates of Rome itself. The majesty of the Roman peace, which Seneca had so boastingly extolled, was shattered into a thousand pieces. Disorder,

confusion, destruction and death poured in upon the stricken peoples like the torrents of the enraged heavens, and against the fury they were helpless, shelterless and defenseless. The ending of Rome seemed to be the consummation of the world. For it was not given to their generation to see that the dissolution of Rome was the beginning of a fairer civilization, a new polity of freedom and a wonderful regeneration of the social order. But if this was denied them, there arose before their eyes that still fairer vision of the celestial City of God and its eternal enfranchisement from the miseries and vicissitudes of earth. In the efficacy of that supernaturalized conception of man's relation to his Creator, also came in after centuries the rehabilitation of the temporal order, though they then saw it not. Sufficient for the time was the laying hold of that higher life in the spiritual order, to work out in the course of the centuries also temporal salvation to the distracted peoples who stood bewildered in the ruins of the ancient institutions. St. Augustine stood between the two worlds, weighing the old in the balance of the new

dispensation and giving the measure of the supernaturalized Word to the new.

At this period began the *termashaw** of the nations, the wandering of the tribes and peoples who were afterwards to constitute the integral parts of Christendom, up and down and about the empire. Their movements were like the eddyings of great waters rushing into some vast plain and seeking settled channels for their onward flow. With them came a heathenism not essentially, but accidentally, different from that of the fallen empire. They, too, were children of Adam and in them also the body of Adam witnessed to the deadly ravages of sin. The paganism of Rome had crystallized into a settled polity, stable as long as its internal forces had not exhausted themselves in the final expansion of its energies, as long as the tensile power of the spring of its machinery had not expended itself. The paganism of the barbarian conquerors of the empire had exploded into savagery. It had made them wanderers on the face of the earth, nomadic hordes roaming

* A word of East Indian origin, used by De Quincey, expressive of the meaning in the text.

the wilderness without habitation or country, lawless and unbridled peoples, every man's hand against them and theirs against every man's. Rough, uncouth, fierce, creatures of passion, unstable and restless as the winds, they understood neither the life of the polity, brooked not the restraint of law against the license of caprice and lust, and knew nothing of the arts of civilization. This in the lump was the character of the poeple whose prey Rome had become; this was the crude mass which the grace of Christianity was to leaven into the new civilization, quicken into life and lift from the sloughs of their degradation to the freedom of the City of God.

For four centuries after the coming of Christianity in the world was the ancient order passing away; for four centuries after the dissolution of the Roman empire was the making of the nations of Christendom going on with varying vicissitudes amidst the stress of the storm of the invasions. It was a constantly shifting scene, and yet withal there was plainly one increasing purpose running through it all. Though many eddies and replications in the current, there was in the

main manifestly one steady onward course of the streams of events. The building up of that City of God which St. Augustine had so luminously portrayed to the minds of his generation at the beginning of the fifth century, was slowly and substantially carried forward in those toilsome ages out of the crude materials of savagery, which the new barbarians had brought with them from the wilderness beyond. Around about the rock of Peter the tribes and peoples surged, around about the only fixed center in all that sea of turmoil and confusion. From that center went forth to them the spiritual power of regeneration, the law of order and the light of illumination in the confusion of the night; the power of the Divine Word calming the wrath of the turbulent seas. It was not a season of speculative and literary manifestation, but a time of social and political regeneration through the power of the supernaturalized word spiritualizing and enfranchising the individual by virtue of his rights and privileges as a citizen of the city whose foundations are in eternity. The very forces of destruction, which seemed to be laying

waste the stability of the civilized life were in reality working towards the conception of a higher ideal and preparing the ground for the institution of a loftier polity. The ruin and the debris of the old order were yet to be cleared away. The barbarism of the internal paganism of Rome, which had stagnated and corrupted, was swept from off the scene, and the new barbarism, which had come from the uncouth wilderness, fresh, though savage, took its place, and, though violent, was active and vigorous with all the rugged energy of a people whose life was spent in a constant struggle against the wild powers of nature. This confluence of the barbarism of a worn-out civilization and of the barbarism of savagery occupied the channel of human history for four centuries, which roared with its tumult from the disastrous days of St. Augustine to the auspicious generation of Charlemagne. Out of the rack and ruin by degrees rose in all its fair proportions the City of God builded out of the lives of the regenerated nations. It was the power of the eternal Word entering into the life of the peoples. The eternal Word made

flesh is the life of man, and during these centuries was the living power of that Word assimilating the redeemed race to the body of the new Adam. Human life was being made over into Divine Life; the natural man, helpless in his own corruption, was being transformed into supernatural man. Only after the truth has been lived can it be manifested in the spoken word, and man must first learn to live that truth before he acquires the power to utter it. It was in these four centuries that men were learning to live that truth by putting off the old man and putting on the new. It was therefore not a period of literary utterance. The power of regeneration was working within the bowels of human society, vivifying it in the truth, which was afterwards to be manifested in Christian science and in Christian art.

In the time of Charlemagne began the utterance of the truth. Men had learned to live the truth; it had now taken root in their souls and leavened their social life. It began first to utter itself in the speculative order, in the region of science. Then were laid the vast foundations of scholasticism, the completest

and most perfect system of human thought, that the mind of man has ever conceived and elaborated. It laid hold of the dead philosophy of Greece and reanimated it, infused into it the living ray of the eternal Word, purged away its errors, supplemented, completed and reconciled it with the divine philosophy of the Incarnation, in whose supernatural light was dissipated the darkness of the fate which had kept the intellect of paganism in ignorance and held its morality in bondage.* Greek philosophy had destroyed Olympus, but at the same time led the pagan mind to the abyss of fate, in whose dread depths knowledge was swallowed in despair. Scholasticism by the power of the living truth of the Incarnation redeemed Greek philosophy from that abyss and dispersed its awful shadow in the sublime light of the science which manifested the unity of truth and demonstrated the harmony between the word of the human intellect and the eternal Word of the Divine Intellect. In that incarnate Word was life and the life was the light of man. The new

*Cardinal Vaughan's "Life of St. Thomas of Aquin" gives a vast and detailed picture of the intellectual life of the scholastic period.

life had become the light of the world. In the light of that Divine Life scholasticism illuminated the darkened intellect of paganism.

The unassisted human intellect in all the centuries of its research into the mystery of living had not found the light, all its speculation, the farthest reach of its thought had achieved no solution of the one problem which makes human existence eventful. The highest efforts of the keenest intellects of the ancient world culminated in the bitter resignation of despair. The Greek mind, the subtlest and the most comprehensive amongst men, searched heaven and earth, explored the heights and the depths, penetrated with its astute analysis the innermost recesses of the human intellect, and yet fell back baffled before the shrouded mystery of man's existence. It made the knowledge of himself the dictum of man's research, and yet failed to know him. "Know thyself" was the first and last maxim of the Greek sage, and of all his science the knowledge of himself was least. He never comprehended the immortal nature of the human soul nor its eternal

destiny, failed to understand its liberty and its responsibility, and his ignorance here arose from his ignorance of God, the beginning and the end of knowledge, whose eternal Word is the light of man. Yet that Greek science of metaphysics was the most elaborate the human mind has ever achieved, the most perfect instrument of human science that man has ever devised.

It was this instrument that scholasticism took into its hands and with it wrought the sublime edifice of its own great science, the science which achieved what the Greeks had failed to accomplish, to understand the human soul, to explain the problem of its destiny, to reconcile its freedom with the divine will and divine knowledge, to solve the mystery of evil, to demonstrate the existence of an absolute order in the midst of a temporal and contingent disorder, all of which had ever remained deepest night to the Greek intellect; and this it did in the light of the philosophy of the Incarnation and according to the canons of human science. Scholasticism is the illumination of the eternal Word in the intellectual order, the light of the life of men

poured in upon the world of human knowledge, and making its dark places clear.

What Plato had darkly dreamed, what Socrates blunderingly desired, what Aristotle vainly labored to uprear, scholasticism wrought through these pregnant centuries, the great temple of divine science where man may come to the rational knowledge of God and, in the fullness of that sublime science, to the knowledge of himself. "Know thyself," proclaimed the wisdom of Greece and the answer echoed mournfully in a distant century, after the sterility of secular wisdom had fully manifested itself to pagan man, in the despairing words of the stoic Emperor: "To-day a little mucus, to-morrow a mummy or ashes." What the human wisdom of Greece failed to see, the Divine Wisdom uttered amongst men in the eternal Word made flesh. By the power of that eternal Word scholasticism built up its stately temple of truth and manifested the rational creature to himself, a rational soul of immortal nature endowed with freedom of will and destined to eternal beatitude. The truth had been given by heaven and the mind of scholasticism

under the celestial illumination redeemed human reason from the bondage which paganism under the name of fate had imposed upon it. It is to scholastic philosophy under revelation that the modern mind owes its emancipation. In the ancient order human reason had never been free because it had never known the truth, the principle of freedom. It groped feebly after liberty, but was ever crushed back by the insoluble problem of necessity, which like Dante's wolf always barred his ascent to the lofty mountain whose distant peak was aureoled by the far-off splendor of the sun of truth. And so did human reason fare in all pagan schools. Whatever their differences, they arrived finally at the same impassable barrier; none might answer the dreadful riddle of the sphinx of fate. Scholasticism followed reason under the guidance of the superior light of heaven; what reason had demonstrated conclusively within its own order, it accepted and followed; what reason might have shown by its own natural light but failed to show in the defectibility of the pagan mind, scholasticism, under the higher illumination,

demonstrated within the merely rational order; and, what was utterly beyond the possible reach of the unassisted human intellect, it bridged the chasm between the world of nature and of grace; it gave a reason in the natural order for the faith in the supernatural order and made luminous the mysteries of the supernatural world in the blended light of the science of reason and the divine science of revelation.

Wheresoever scholastic science has been abandoned in the philosophical world the old darkness has again fallen upon the human intellect. The philosophy which has sprung from the denial of faith has simply been a return to the pagan systems and has conjured up again the same ancient problems, resuscitating the old ghosts out of the ancient darkness that beset the pagan mind. There is the same failure to understand the nature of man, the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the reconciliation between a divine providence and human freedom. In place of a personal God, the world-soul of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius becomes the overruling power, the impersonal

force which moulds and fashions all things and into which man himself is ultimately resolved. Back into the same abyss of impersonality are swept man and freedom. Such is the philosophical inheritance where scholasticism has been deserted and men have delivered themselves over to the feeble guidance of unilluminated reason.

In scholasticism rose the great edifice of human science, the science of truth, which alone has made the human intellect free, builded up through those great centuries from the time of Charlemagne. Alongside this great temple of science rose its fitting type in the world of religious art, the Gothic cathedral. In architecture the Gothic cathedral was the sublime expression of the new teaching, which had transformed the Western world and was building the nations up from the ruins of the perished empire. It grew up with the new life of the nations, the wonderful reflex of the new spiritual structure which the Word of Regeneration had builded out of the redeemed souls of men into the City of God.

It is in the religious temple that may

best be seen the fullest expression of the highest thought of a race or a people. Here will be found the embodiment of their spiritual life, the animating spirit of their existence and the noblest incorporation of the religious sentiment, the profoundest and most lasting in the heart of man. Upon their temples have all peoples lavished the treasures of their greatest art and concentrated the splendors of their genius. What a people's temples are, that you will find them. Greece erected a temple of the fairest proportions, perfect in balance and symmetry of lines; but it was the shrine of a humanized divinity; it rose no higher than the entablature above its columns. It sat firmly upon the earth and gave evidence of no celestial aspiration. Rome capped her temple with a dome as symbol of her power of universal dominion. Under the dome of her Pantheon were gathered all the divinities of all the nations. The dome was the expression of her inclusive jurisdiction over the peoples of the earth. But the Roman dome was not lifted up into the mid-heavens; it sat close and heavy upon the oppressed walls; it was the sign of terrene

domination, not of spiritual aspiration. But the Gothic cathedral is the expression of spiritualized matter, the aspiration of the redeemed earth heavenward, of humanity freed from the bondage of temporal things soaring upward to the freedom of spiritual life. Though the symmetry of the Greek temple be perfect, taken in the whole it rests heavily upon the earth and the Roman dome weighs downward. Though solid and substantial as both, the Gothic cathedral springs from the earth like lightest fire; its fluted column and pointed arch rush upward converging to the tapering spire that loses itself flaming white in the ether of heaven. It is earth, made loquent by the eternal Word, speaking heaven; the heart of man burning with Divine love breathing its fire into stone, until the inanimate matter grown instinct with his ardent heat, ascends in prayer towards the Divine Source of all-life and all-being. Such was the prime symbolism of the Gothic cathedral, the sublime expression of the new life of the nations. And as that new life grew out of the redeeming power of the cross, that magnificent symbol was

founded in the sign of man's redemption; the Gothic cathedral is cruciform. As the new life was to find its fruition in the possession of the triune God it aspired heavenwards in three steeples towards the abode of the Most High. As the redemption was for all nations, its three principal entrances, again symbolizing the Trinity, represented the conflux of all peoples to the house of the living God. As salvation was through the Mystical Rose of the house of David and its fruition in the beatific vision, in which the elect form the white rose of heaven so spiritually described in Dante's Paradiso, the rose was a radical element of all decoration in its style. Within this stupendous temple, where nave and transept crossed, was the quire, a temple within a temple, where stood the tabernacle of the living God dwelling amongst men, the center of all, whence radiated the light and the beauty of the whole, the source of power and grace and love, the living fountain from whose waters men drank eternal life. Thus were the cross and the rose the chief symbols of its art, signifying the path of sorrow to the fruition of eternal happiness, death to

this world that man may rise to the eternal life of the world to come, the things of earth blossoming upward into the blooming fullness of eternity. From its cyclopean foundations to the chorus of its shimmering spires the Gothic cathedral voiced in carven stone the sublime Word of eternal life. Its day was the day of the power of faith, which could make even the mute stones conspire to the harmony of heaven and sing the glory of God in the highest.*

As was the Gothic cathedral in the order of art such was scholasticism in the order of science. It took human thought, the material of human speculation, and builded it up into a temple of science whose lofty turrets pierced the heavens. Its foundations were laid as deep and as solid, its embellishments were as harmonious and delicate. Its inspiration was from the same spiritual source, its aspiration as sublime. It spoke that same eternal Word of life not with the tongue of devotion, but in the voice of reason. It is not to the carnal eye that this great edifice of

*Cf. F. Schlegel "History of Literature," Lecture VIII., p. 191, Bohn's Edition.

scholastic science is visible, but to the eye of the mind it rises in the beauty of its vast proportion, in the perfect balance of its parts, in the bold and exquisite symmetry of its outlines, solid as the eternal rock in its massive bases, light as air in its innumerable pinnacles pricking into the empyrean.

In the order of art and in the order of science never has man builded so wonderfully nor so majestically, as in the centuries which saw the rise of the Gothic cathedral and scholastic science. Worthy counterparts of the same sublime idea they stand alone amongst the achievements of mankind. Architectural art has never equalled the Gothic cathedral, human speculation has never reached the heights which scholastic science scaled, nor sounded the depths in which its foundations rest. They are the unique types of Christian thought and Christian art, manifestation of the light of the eternal Word in the intellect and the expression of the beauty of that same Word in the human imagination. The modern mind has speculated much, but never so profoundly, never so sublimely, never so systematically,

never so lucidly, never so completely, and save where the modern mind has followed the illumination of scholastic science, it has fallen into confusion and darkness. Modern man has builded much, but without definite conception, without original thought or else in helpless imitation of the heroic architecture of the middle age, those lofty ages of the inspiration and the achievements of faith.

While the Gothic cathedral was building like an exhalation of earth to heaven and scholasticism was uprearing the walls of its great edifice of thought, in the world of lighter literature appeared a new manifestation. Amongst the people of Christendom rose a class of wandering bards known as troubadours and trouvéres, whose theme was love and heroic deeds. In their songs or ballads appeared a new element in literature, an element which the love songs of paganism never evinced. The love songs of the poets of Greece and Rome were erotic, songs of carnal passion, not addressed to the pure object of a chaste love, but to the siren who for the moment kindled the sensuous flame of a disordered affection. Amongst the

Christian bards of the middle ages love was idealized, and the poetry of love for the first time intoned its theme on an ideal. The key-note of the songs of the troubadours was an ideal love of beauty, enjeweled in purity as one precious stone set within another. Paganism had never known the ideal of womanhood, and in heathen society the bondage of the flesh had weighed most heavily and degradingly on woman. Christianity had presented the supreme ideal of womanhood to the world, and exalted her to a station, where the sanctity of virginity and the beauty of maternity shone resplendent about her in an aureole of celestial effulgence. In the gracious light of this sublime ideal, which Christianity presented in the immaculate model of the Divine Mother, the Catholic world had conceived woman. Domestic society grew chaste under that pure influence. The wife and the mother became the moral keystone of the household, and the sanctity of marriage, raised to the sacramental dignity, hallowed the relation between man and the prudent partner of his blood. The indissolubility of the connubial bond and marital faith acted

like a purifying leaven, and fostered as an inestimable treasure an ideal love and loyalty. By virtue of this lofty conception human love became transformed amongst Christian peoples. While indeed rooted in natural affection, as must always needs be, it became spiritualized and sublimated. It was transfixed in an ideal which transcended any vicissitude of human passion, it was supernaturalized by a higher love, which gave it an intensity and depth beyond its own feeble power. It became such a love as is so beautifully expressed in that exalted sentiment of a Catholic wife speaking of the love of her Catholic spouse in Madame Craven's *Recit D'une Sœur:* "I can indeed say that we never loved each other so much as when we saw how both loved God," and again: "My husband would not have loved me as he did, if he had not loved God more." It was the power of this gracious ideal of the eternal Word which was regenerating domestic society, building up the family in the sanctification of supernaturalized love by which alone human affection is saved from the degradation of sensualism. It was in this

exalted conception of love that the idealization of troubadour poetry was rooted. Its theme was the exaltation of love, a love pure, constant and loyal, ennobled by faith in the Divine and chastened by the eye of the Spirit under the illumination of an ideal. While the troubadour celebrated the charms of his beloved and varied his strain according to the measure of the occasion, the soul of his theme was ever the ideal of beauty and the beauty of the ideal, of which the object of his affection was the exemplification in the concrete. It was in truth love that he loved, the ideal at whose shrine he offered his poetic sacrifice. This was the new and distinguishing element in the love songs of the troubadours, an ideal for the first time manifested in amatory poetry, arising from the higher conception of human affections sanctified to the supernatural plane to which Christianity had lifted domestic society.

In the heroic poetry of the trouvéres we find the same spirit of the ideal leavening the mass. In the Christian knight purity in thought, word and deed, constancy in love, and loyalty in arms were the virtues that

made him worthy of knighthood. Prowess of arms alone could not make him a true knight without those qualities which constituted the essence of chivalry. Gentleness, courtesy, the veneration of woman, zeal and readiness to redress wrongs and establish justice wheresoever he might ride was the lofty ideal of the Christian knight. Loyalty to his ideal was his first passion, and loyalty is founded only in an ideal. The fealty of love to its ideal is loyalty. Its faith must be constant and unswerving, not only in deed and in word but in thought. Paganism could command allegiance but it could not teach loyalty. The conception of an ideal which could infuse the individual conscience and exalt the will to a heroic love of duty could only be the fruit of spiritual faith rooted in a supernatural love. This was the ideal of chivalry whose spirit animated the trouvére poetry of the middle ages. It sang the valor and deeds of its heroes in the inspiration of the ideal of Christian knighthood. While it sang of Roland and Charlemagne and Arthur, and celebrated their achievements in arms, the ideal knight was the true subject of its

theme, the knight who loved right before might and whose purity shone more resplendent than his valor, and whose valor grew greater for his purity.

If we were to characterize the middle ages in one word, we should call them the centuries of the ideal. In scholastic science the ideal in thought manifested itself; in the Gothic cathedral the ideal in art aspired; in the poetry of troubadour and trouvére the social ideal, the ideal of love, found expression in the music of song. It was the new order of Christianity blossoming in the souls of men and building up the City of God to celestial music. Then for the first time in human history the new virtue of loyalty appeared in the world; loyalty to maid and wife, loyalty to Lord spiritual and Lord temporal, loyalty to all the duties and relations of life, founded in that spiritualized conception of eternal life which Christianity had brought to the nations and was building up into Christendom. They were ages of life because they were ages of faith, when men wrought greatly and nobly in the power of the Christian ideal; ages of light, when the

illumination of a Divine science manifested man to himself in the knowledge of God and showed him the way of his temporal peregrination to his eternal destiny.

The ripest fruit of this period appeared in the Divine conception of Dante's great poem, in which the science and the poetic art of this wonderful day of illumination were blended in an organ-like harmony, whose music rolls to the majestic motion of the spheres. The "Divina Commedia" was the flight of a towering fantasy, which rose beyond the stars and made visible the invisible things of God according to the law and order of Catholic science. The subject matter of the poem was the new truth which had made the world other, leading man from paganism to Christianity. For a thousand years the science of the new truth had been elaborated by the awakened intellect of regenerated man. When paganism was still dominant, its vast foundations were laid by the early Fathers of the Church; under the genius of St. Athanasius and St. Augustine it rose in its lofty beauty above the colossal ruin of the moribund empire; through the turbulent period

of the wandering of the nation it stood majestic and impregnable, ever growing upward under the hands of masters in Israel like the great Leo and the great Gregory down to the day of the poet's contemporaries, Hugo and Richard of St. Victor, St. Bonaventura, the seraphic Doctor, and prince of all, St. Thomas Aquinas, the angelic doctrine whose exalted genius crowned the great edifice in his two great Summæ, the master-works of the world's science. Into the service of this divine science had been pressed all the intellectual acumen and profundity of what the East and West had been possessed. It was the summation of this sublime science which Dante threw into the alembic of his great imagination and made sing the master-song of all the ages.

The central truth of the new doctrine was the revelation of man's nature in the light of his eternal end. That eternal end as the measure of all things human is the theme of the "Divina Commedia." The final state of man is the tremendous picture limned by the genius of the Florentine poet. The invisible world, which Christianity had made the

purpose of man's life and which supplied the motives of his conduct in the order of the new dispensation, was made a visible, palpable reality delineated in living lines under the inspiration of scholastic science. The poet conducts us through the regions of eternal loss, the realm of purification and the kingdom of beatitude. Man and nature, free will and grace, reason and faith, the three kingdoms of nature, grace and glory, man sinning, repentant and triumphant, fall within the immense score of the poet's vision and are elucidated with scholastic precision.* Yet with all the accuracy and profundity of philosophic thought, the sustained power of an abundant and towering imagination weaves the most delicate threads of the subtlest truths into the vast fabric of his mighty song. His imagination is immense, comprehensive, sublime; at the same time accurate, detailed and systematic. It never loses itself in the vague or the indefinite. Its pictures stand out in bold and clear cut outlines in exact proportion

* Hettinger's "Dante's Divina Commedia," translated by H. S. Bowden, Cf., Editor's Preface; "Dante and Scholastic Philosophy," by Ozanam, translated by L. D. Pychowska, is a full and admirable study of the poet and his meaning.

and in finest detail. The very measurements of Malebolge are given ; for in that region of internal disorder the supreme order of the universe reigns in the external power of the supreme justice, which there manifests itself in dispensing to the sinner the evil which he has freely chosen. Even hell has a plan, not indeed of its own making, but in accord with that larger disposition of the universe whose absolute order is evinced in the supreme love which has decreed the maintenance of its law in the perpetual justice of an eternal penalty.

To the right understanding of the "Divina Commedia" must be brought more than ordinary knowledge and more than common intelligence. It is the supremest literary product of the greatest creative intellectual epoch in human history. It consummately unites science and art, and to appreciate it the science and the art of its period must be comprehended in the height and the depth of their great spirit. Unfortunately this is what our age is least prepared to do, and as a rule utterly mistakes the nature and character of Dante's great work. Evidence of its complete misconception of the "Divina Commedia"

lies in its meager acquaintance with only the first third of the work. Rarely does the modern reader get beyond the Inferno, perhaps through the Purgatorio—does he ever essay the Paradiso? Yet the Paradiso is the key and solution of the poem. It is in the Paradiso that the artistic and moral perfection of the work lies; here is the sun of its light, the consummation of its art. As in morals so in art the perfection of the work lies in the end. Dante himself frequently warns us that the difficulties and obscurities which beset his path in the Inferno and Purgatorio can alone be cleared up in the Paradiso under the illumination of Divine Wisdom.* But it is into the Paradiso that the modern world follows him with most reluctance or not at all. And this lack of spiritual diligence or this spiritual antipathy is strikingly symbolical of the times. The road through the Inferno is easy to travel; it is always downward; the way up the mountain of purgatory is not so easy, but it is still within the effort of the earnest climber;

*Whenever Virgil (Human reason) cannot solve Dante's difficulties, he refers the poet to Beatrice, "Divine Wisdom or Revelation."

but in the Paradiso the ascent is purely spiritual, a true way of illumination and only possible to the spiritually minded. Without heaven there is no meaning to hell and purgatory. The vindication of eternal justice has no significance save in the reward of eternal love; the way of purification has no place in the moral order save in the consummation of divine beatitude. The Paradiso is the picture of the state of beatitude and is the most consummate flight of the human imagination in the history of all literature. Dante has painted that picture in pure light; the Paradiso is an image of intensest light, unfolding in increasing degrees of glory as we ascend to the eternal center and source of all truth and life. It is so subtilely and ethereally depicted that the common imagination cannot breath its sublime atmosphere. Yet it is not merely a flight of imagination; it is an orderly and systematic exposition of the divinest science, under whose intense illumination the poet's vast fancy glows at white heat. Here is found the meaning and supreme solution of human living. Here is the perfected consummation of the universe,

where freedom is resolved into a perfect will, and the perfection of the creature is fulfilled in the possession of the Creator without the loss of identity or the diminution of liberty. In the supreme love there manifested in perfect beatitude is seen the moral necessity of its vindication in the order of eternal justice, and hence the existence of hell, where supreme justice constrains the evil will to the moral order of the universe; and hence also the evidence of the moral exigency of the purgatorial mountain, where the disorder resulting in the soul from repented sin and uncleansed guilt, may be rectified and the soul be re-established in perfect order before entering into the region of supremest harmony.

A fatal misunderstanding of the poem, and one too common, is not to see that its imagery is symbolical and at the same time literal. Critics often indulge the shallow notion that the imagery of the "Divina Commedia" is simply—and here we see the limited comprehension of the "Divina Commedia" so currently general—is simply the delineation of the gross imagination of a rude period in human history, as they are pleased

to put it. This small opinion not only evinces ignorance of the Paradiso where the imagery is the most subtle ever wrought by the human imagination, but also shows the most utter misapprehension of the poem's significance, an altogether shallow and superficial conception of the profoundest picture in all literature. For the figure of the "Divina Commedia," though vivid and real, full of color and movement and alive in its every detail, is always the symbol as well as the literal expression of a great moral truth, lying back of the outward picture, which manifests it. In the Inferno, for instance, the moral condition of the lost souls is described by their physical state. Carnal sinners are blown forever on raging blasts to typify the whirlwind of passon which finally becomes their fixed state in the abode of perdition. Those who have sinned through anger are immersed in the thick and muddy waters of a bog emblematic of the dense and sullen atmosphere with which anger beclouds the reason. Schismatics are cleft asunder, hypocrits weighed with heavy cloaks of gilded lead and the proud impounded and frozen in ice,

showing the isolation and immobility of pride. Such is the symbol of the sin and at the same time the actual and final state of the sinner.

Another commom misconception lies in the supposition that the meaning and significance of the "Divina Commedia" is bound up with Dante's notion of the physical construction of the universe and that with the explosion of the Ptolemaic conception of the world, the interests and the purport of the poem pass. Amongst others, even as acute an intellect as Carlyle's—though indeed he admires Dante to the full in some respects—indulges this shallow criticism, as if the mere location of the regions of hell and purgatory, according to the Ptolemaic conception of the earth, in any way affected their moral and their spiritual significance.* To imagine that the meaning of the poem is lost with the explosion of Dante's geocentric theory is to entirely miss its real purport; for that would be to bind eternal interests to temporal and local accidents. The place of purgatory may not be on the other side of the earth nor the locus of hell a convex cone in its interior—

* Carlyle's "History of Literature," Chap. VI.

though indeed in the invisible world that might, for aught we know, be the unseen arrangement—still hell and purgatory are logically and morally what Dante has described them, the one the region of eternal loss, the other the place of temporary purification for eternal gain. It is significant that Carlyle—and in Carlyle we have a type of the times—does not speak of the Paradiso except incidentally, never with any evidence that he has seized the full meaning of Dante's sublime conception.* His silence is typical. He saw the dissonance of wrong-doing in the universe and logically arrived at its eternal culmination, hell, and he saw the way of mercy in the region of purification, purgatory. But he did not see the supreme solution, the supreme victory of Divine Goodness over evil in the region of eternal perfection, Paradiso. As with Carlyle so with the age. It will never comprehend the "Divina Commedia" in its fullness until it has returned to the spirit out of whose inspiration the great Christian poem of the ages rose, a tower

* He seems to think the Purgatorio the best part of the "Divina Commedia."

of strength and of beauty for all time, the spirit which lifted the massive and delicate beauty of the Gothic cathedral to the heavens, the spirit which elaborated the Divine science of scholasticism to the empyrean of the intellectual world, the spirit which in Dante's poem breathes the loftiest beauty and utters the sublimest truth in conspiration with the science and the art of the greatest and supremest creative age in all human history.

AFTER DANTE.

The middle ages saw the establishment of the unity of Christendom. There is but one power of unity in the world and that is spiritual. Christendom was the outcome of this power of truth, and the ascendency of the spiritual power over temporal things was the keystone of that great fabric which rose to such sublime height in the ages of faith. True unity develops freedom and freedom is the variety of the unity of truth. The unity of the Roman empire was mechanical; it had no power of variety and it perished. The unity of Christendom was spiritual with an infinite capacity of expansion and after the day of Dante it began to manifest itself in a wonderful variety in the crystallization of the nations.

Variety without unity begets confusion and ends in destruction. Distinctive elements without a common bond collide in antagonisms which end in death. This it

was that dissipated Greek nationality. It fell away under the incessant attrition of oppositions which found no solution in the supreme order of spirituality. Christendom was essentially the domination of the spiritual over the temporal, and in its transcendent unity the contingent differences which divided temporal things found both a sufficient bond of coherence and an amplitude of movement which, not only saved them from mutual destruction, but preserved them in harmonious rotation around a common center. We find, therefore, in Christendom what heathendom utterly lacked, a unity which begot mutual variety and a variety which manifested the common unity. This arose from the spiritual and transcendental character of the principle of unity, while the principle of variety was a free subordination to the spiritual power whose domination exalted temporal concerns to eternal interests.

The reverse had obtained in the ancient order; the things of time were invested with paramount interest and eternal considerations had weighed little in the scale of human existence. The stress of effort therefore and the

actuation of motives lay in gaining temporal goods, which necessarily concluded in slavery to the passions of the moment and the interests of the world. Pagan man had forfeited his natural freedom, which was founded in his eternal destiny, by bending all his energies to the consummation of his life in time. Christian man gained his freedom from the bondage of the world, which had once held him shackled in both the political and the social order, by striving for eternal goods whose worth alone was in keeping with the dignity of his nature. His destiny in eternity was his emancipation in time; for he alone is free whose happiness is independent of temporal contingencies and anchored in eternal certainties. And more than this, the Christian ideal of eternity converts the uses of this life to an importance which of themselves they could never possess; things of time become invested with the spirit of eternity; they partake of an eternal character inasmuch as their uses here become an eternal issue hereafter.

It was this conception of life that had seized upon the mediæval mind and was

working out the independent nationalities of Europe. In the unity of this supreme idea Christendom was formed, and in the variety which emanated from this unity, as branches of the same trunk, arose the diverse nationalities that grouped about their respective social and political centers. The genius of Christianity was moulding all and moulding each diversely; for in the universality of that unity was possible all variety; one Christendom but many peoples, one domination but many liberties; spiritual unity but temporal varieties. This was the supreme ideal which the middle ages left as an inheritance to modern Europe and to which the two subsequent centuries were working when the division of the unity of the truth, which the beginning of the sixteenth century witnessed, ushered in the spiritual calamity whose pernicious effects are still perpetuated in the indifferentism and agnosticism of our own century.

Meanwhile with the formation of the nationalities came the formation of the languages of Europe. Here was a new phenomenon in the world. With the ancient division

of languages the unity of the word was lost and men spoke different tongues because they had forfeited the unity of truth. With the restoration of the unity of truth there sprang up diverse languages charged with the unity of the Word. In the ancient world there was confusion of speech by reason of the different meanings spoken in divided tongues; in the modern world there is a unity of diverse tongues by reason of the same meaning spoken by all in various ways. The confusion of speech into which ancient man fell was a penalty; the gift of diverse tongues uttering the same truth which modern man enjoys, is a reward. Diversity of speech, the penalty of the ancient world, becomes under the transforming power of the unity of truth, which is accorded to man in the new dispensation, the gift of the freedom of speech, the power of variety uttering the same eternal Word in a profusion of ways. Modern languages are Catholic; their structure is essentially Catholic; they were moulded and fashioned under Catholic influences; their spirit and life is Catholic; strike out the soul of Catholicity which animates them, and they

perish utterly. They are many but Catholic, and while their varieties mark one from another in a marvelous distinction of richness, it is their Catholicity which makes them rich and gives them the power of the variety which distinguishes them so abundantly. They are new languages derived radically, it is true, from languages that had gone before, but their chief and essential formative influence was the soul of the spirit of Catholicity, in those ages when that spirit was predominant and was moulding anew the entire social and political structure of Europe.

The genius of Catholicity was to infuse its own spirit of unity and universality into all that it met with, and yet leave each distinct in the freedom of its own proper nature. The formation of languages like the formation of nationalities was a native growth, free to develop each in its own soil and according to its own peculiar circumstances, yet all informed with the same dominant spirituality which made all children of the same mother. We find, therefore, in all the languages of Christendom a moral and spiritual vigor, an idealization of expression which we

look for in vain in the ancient languages and which does not exist in the speech of peoples beyond the pale of Christendom. Notwithstanding the subtle elegance of Greek and the stately precision of Latin, which has ever made them models in these qualities, they do not possess the spiritual intensity, the moral height and the pliant variety of the Christian tongues. Nor do we find in them that great imaginative power of idealism, that exuberance of fancy and symbolism which has developed in modern tongues under the stimulus of the wide vision of Catholic thought. Take, for instance, the language of love and chivalry which grew into the literature of trouvére and troubadour and which has incorporated itself indissolubly in every European tongue, expressive of the ideal of supernaturalized love, of loyalty, of valor and of purity; neither Greek nor Latin has the capacity in moral breadth or depth to convey this world of sublime ideas, which burgeoned from the prolific stalk of Catholic truth and flowered into the noble speech of Catholic peoples. We, to whom our Catholic speech is a daily commonplace, do not realize

the profound significance which attaches to it and which was elaborated with the spiritual growth of those distant ages, when the soul of faith was fashioning it; and it is only when by study we go to the heart of language that we learn the lesson of its power and the wonderful mysteries of its life, growing out of the regenerative grace of the eternal Word made manifest amongst men. And these are the languages that came into being during the ages of faith and were wrought to the lofty expression of Catholic truth and sentiment in the literature of troubadour and trouvére, in the beautiful and devoted poetry of the early Franciscans and in the genius of Dante.

Although the Latin tongue had been retained as the language of learning and science, when the spirit of living literature began to animate the hearts of the new peoples, it was in the vulgar tongue that it sought expression, in the tongue that spoke the living mind of the people, and not in the dried husk of a dead speech, which conveyed no living image to the awakened imagination and found no response in a heart pulsing with the vigor of new life. Latin was utterly inadequate to

the new literature, and its extinction as the language of the imagination—for it is in the imagination that the literary faculty resides—was inevitable with the awakening of the world of new ideas, new aspirations and new sentiments that had come with the new life. Latin was as impotent to express the true literary thought of those days as the Roman temple to embody the sublime idea of the Gothic cathedral. It was the instinct of genius that led Dante to abandon the composition of the "Divina Commedia" in Latin, in which he had actually commenced it. It was only in a living speech that his genius could have fashioned that majestic canticle, and in the living tongue which had already found itself spiritualized by the common speech of a people's living faith and consecrated to sacred uses by St. Francis and his brother poets in the humble garb of Franciscan friars.*

The realization of the power of the new tongues, the power of the Christianized Word grew fuller and completer after Dante had

*See Ozanam on the influence of the early Franciscan poets on the thought and poetry of their day.

manifested its sublime capacity to the admiring peoples. Latin indeed held its own as the language of science in the region of abstract thought, where its quality of stability rendered it an instrument of exactness and precision. But for this very reason it became inadequate to the expression of the living sentiment and vitalized imagination of the Christian peoples. The new life required a new tongue, and the literature of Christendom steadily developed to that varied perfection of speech, which manifests itself so diversely in modern languages. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw this steady growth and development, not indeed without retardation here and there from the hampering clogs of the tradition which still venerated Latin as a perfected tongue and still choked the channels of an unimpeded progress. On the whole, however, the currents of the venacular flowed onward in a rapid advance, deepening and broadening as they went.

Unfortunately the fifteenth century witnessed a movement in the world of literature which became a distinct source of corruption. Never has misnomer been more strikingly

applied than in calling the overwrought admiration of this period for the ancient classics the revival of learning. It was a distinct abandonment of the real learning which the illumination of Christianity had brought to the nations and to which the awakened intellect of Europe owed its vigor and its virtue, and an attempted return to that pagan ideal which had abased man to the slavery of the old Roman empire and had brought his reason to that fatal theory of stoic despair or to the degrading doctrine of epicureanism.* What is called the rebirth of letters in the fifteenth century was not simply the effort to rehabilitate the finished style of the ancient classics, but the studied attempt to rejuvenate and infuse into the thought of the period the very spirit and life of the old paganism. Had the movement simply aimed at the establishment of the rhetorical polish of Cicero as a model of the current literature, though that were futile then as it always will be to fashion a living after a dead tongue, to model life after death—the disastrous effects of the

*Cf. Pastor's introduction to his "History of the Popes" on the degenerate character of the false humanism of the so-called renaissance.

renaissance—I call it renaissance by toleration of usage—would have been mitigated to the temporary artificiality of language which is inevitably brought about by the sterile attempt to inform a living speech with the spirit of a perished language. Had this been the sole purpose of the renaissance, its results would have disappeared like the passing of a cloud, for the living forces which then animated the languages of Europe would have soon burst, as they did, the constraining bond which the false rhetoric of the day had put upon them. But this unfortunately was not the only goal of its false enterprise; it sought not only a return to the manner of the ancient classics, but endeavored, and in some measure sucessfully, to resuscitate the deadly spirit of its corruption; it would revive the spirit which had expended itself in the orgies of the Bacchanal and degraded itself in the cult of the Cyprian Venus. Under the plea of cultivating the rhetoric of the classics and emancipating reason from the restraints which a supernaturalized morality had placed upon its proneness to license, the false humanism of the fifteenth century would have

plunged it again into the abyss of darkness from which the Divine science of Christianity alone had been able to rescue it. Its pernicious consequences survived its own day and contributed not a little to bring about that violent division of the unity of truth in the sixteenth century whose effects still live in the most lamentable confusion of thought which human history has ever witnessed.* But in spite of the false humanism of the fifteenth century, its corruption of the Christian imagination and Christian truth, the languages and literature of Europe were too fresh and too vigorous in their great sources to yield to its corroding and destructive influences. The new literature blossomed forth in the new tongues according to the fashion of their own vitality; and in two countries especially, the most remote amongst the nations of Europe from the influences of the renaissance, manifested itself with a natural power and a luxuriance that in intensity, richness and sublimity has excelled both ancient and all modern literature. These

*Outside of the system of Catholic unity, theological and philosophical thought is a chaos of splinters.

countries are Spain and England in whose two great dramatists, Calderon and Shakespeare, is to be seen the consummation of their respective literary genius.

In nothing does the literary power of a people manifest itself more intensely and more comprehensively than in the drama. Literature is always a reflex of life. It is an intimate manifestation of the heart and mind of a people, but in no species of literature is the picture of human existence so intimately, variedly and fully portrayed as in the drama. Here above all other places is the mirror held up most faithfully to nature and the shifting scene of life rendered most striking to the imagination. Here the written word is intensified by the power of speech and vivified by the virtue of action. The play of sentiment and emotion, the antithesis or harmonies of situations, the opportunity of contrast between the interior motive and the outward act, the possibility of the analysis and at the same time the synthesis of all that goes to make up the tangled skein of human life, gives to dramatic art a range and a comprehension beyond

any other species of literature. It is therefore the sublimest opportunity of genius, the severest test of its power.

In three degrees does dramatic art manifest human life, and in proportion to the degree will be its dignity and its sublimity. It may in the first place portray the mere appearances of things, give only the surface and the show of life, grouping its play and plot into the accidents of time and place. Within this rank falls comedy, dealing merely with characters and the complexities of their chance intercourse as they fortuitously move about within the shifting scenes of existence. In this species of drama the inner spring of motive is hidden or ignored; the relations of life, whose roots lie in our innermost being, are here set forth at haphazard or as broken. Its motif is therefore the incongruous, the humerous, the farcical; hence comedy; or if there be any approach to the serious, the incongruous then becomes sentimentality; there is an attempt to adjust the broken relation without solving the incongruity. It is at this level that dramatic art in our day for the most part seems to have settled. The

reason is at hand; we have lost the key of the inner life; we have ignored the spiritualities of human existence.*

In the second place dramatic art may represent human life, not only in its external appearances, but in its interior motives, setting forth not only the visible actions but the invisible power that prompts them, without however discovering the solution of life's cross-purposes and its fatal contradictions. The medley of existence, the surface play of the incidents and accidents, with which comedy contents itself, is swept aside for deeper considerations. Here the interior motive is exposed and its logical sequences in action, the struggle between passion and reason, between conscience and the current norm of morality, without however any perception of the ultimate sanction or any resolution of the dissonances, which it has set forth, into the triumph of harmony. This is the region of tragedy, for tragedy deals with passion and the catastrophe which follows from the sweep of its destructive forces. In

* Our melodrama is for the most part mere sentimentalism, and our dramatic realism a vulgar photography of the worse than commonplace. Both lack spirituality.

this species of the drama there is no illumination; it is a region of darkness. Life is stripped bare and naked and the ground of its action is made void. The movement is to the abyss; the catastrophe is that abyss in which all is swallowed remorselessly and purposelessly. We are left with an immense pity or a profound despair of human existence. The problem of life has sounded from the lips of the Sphinx and there is no answer.

The third degree of dramatic art may represent life to us in all its interior preplexities and in its profoundest contradictions, but it proposes the problem of life to illuminate and to solve it. The tragedy of passion is transformed into the victory of love; the dissonance of time into the consonance of eternity; catastrophe into triumph, because life here assumes another relation than that of time. In the light of its spirituality it becomes linked with eternal issues, transcends the outrageous slings of fortune and the fatalities of earth, and finds the resolution of all its difficulties in an eternal destiny encompassed and glorified by the immortal fullness of the spiritual life. Human life is indeed

set forth full of the miseries of its earthly pilgrimage, the burden and toil of struggle, but this path of suffering is the illuminated way to the glory of the spiritual triumph. To dramatically portray human existence in the sublimity of this illumination is the supremest reach of dramatic genius. Comedy is its lowest office; tragedy rises to the next degree. Comedy deals with characters; tragedy with passions and this third species of dramatic art with souls.*

Calderon is the master-genius of this highest species of dramatic art. His drama stands as the highest type of the exemplification of the Christian idea in the dramatic world, the most exalted and the sublimest dramatic manifestation of human existence on the ancient or the modern stage. He above all others most profoundly and most nobly sets forth the final issue of human suffering in spiritual transfiguration. What Dante had shown forth in that form so peculiar to his genius, the triumph of supreme justice and love, the genius of Calderon has moulded

*Cf. Hello in "Les Plateaux de la Balance"—Les Caractères, les Passions et les Ames.

into dramatic form. Not less profound and myriad-minded than Shakespeare, the genius of the Spaniard transcends our own great dramatic master in the supreme conception of life and its final meaning. Shakespeare never manifests the finality of things; his drama gives us no solution of human life; it is ever an enigma; there is no answer to the riddle. None excel him, if any equal him, in his wonderful comprehension of human nature, his profound penetration into the human heart, his searching analysis and expression of human motives, his sympathetic insight into the passions and ambitions of men, his intimate knowledge of nature, his copious power of description, the keenness and subtlety with which he lays bare the innermost springs of action, his universal acquaintance with men in all manners and conditions of life and that deep poetic vision, which has power to search heaven and earth to gather figure and illustration wherewith to set forth the vast and various utterance of his quick and comprehensive imagination, in which, as in a gigantic and deep mirror, the phatasmata of man and nature were caught

and reflected with wonderful power of concentration and expression from the revolving spheres of the myriad-lighted heavens to the innermost recesses of the complex human heart or the remote abysses which the deeps of ocean guard in silence and in darkness. Yet with all this vast faculty, this gigantic reach of imagination, this keen and profound intelligence, Shakespeare does not illuminate life; he has no solution for its chiefest mystery. Human existence is still an enigma, a riddle which no man may read aright, a brave or a miserable showing, a pageant where the motley of folly and the purple of wisdom mingle in strange dissonance and fall into the nameless void which time is ever making in the path of the crowding throng. He touches with a master-hand the springs of love, pity, mercy, hate, revenge and ambition, but when these have run their blind course and sounded the gamut of all life's vanities, he has no word of solution, no divine note of reconciliation to mark the way of supreme justice or point the path of supreme love, in whose absolute resolution life becomes transcendently transfigured.

It is here that the genius of Calderon excels that of our own great bard. The Spaniard mirrors life as faithfully to nature as the Englishman; with even more elaboration of manner, an elaboration tinged with an exuberance of fancy with which the severer taste and compacter imagination of Northern peoples is scarcely in sympathy; he, too, sets forth the pageantry and the show of life, its dissonances and its perplexities, the apparent enigma of its sufferings; but over all he throws the illumination of the spiritual life and the glory of the issue in that transcendent solution which the eternal Word has uttered for all time and by whose virtue the body of paganism was resurrected to the new life of Christianity. Shakespeare never transcends the tragedy of passion; he loves the catastrophe. His genius haunts the gloom of mystery, and that the mystery of darkness. It is akin to the sombre shadows of the old paganism of the North. He is acquainted with the mysteries of the abyss rather than of the heights. He is more familiar with the powers of darkness than with the angels of light.*

* Hello—Les Préjugés.

Witness Macbeth and the Tempest. The Tempest is a tissue of enchantments woven by occult and uncanny powers. In Macbeth hell is victorious. The plot is infernal, the initiation of the movement is with the powers of darkness, its direction is by them and the issue is their triumph. Shakespeare's catastrophes are not vindications of an outraged justice; they are the indiscriminating conclusions of passion overwhelming good and bad indifferently. There is no ray of light to illumine the darkness of the issue, no word of hope, no token of the spiritual meaning of suffering, no hint of its transfiguration into something higher. Life breaks off purposelessly unfulfilled, a fitful fever that has burned itself out, full of sound and fury, existing without reason and ceasing without explanation.

In Calderon the flame of life burns as intensely as in Shakespeare; the vanities of the world, the emptiness of its pageantry, the folly of its wisdom, the transiency of its ambitions, its passions and its disasters are limned with as careful a hand and illuminated with as subtle an understanding, graven

with as delicate and as strong an imagination, but over all is the supernal light of a Christian transfiguration; human existence is neither an enigma nor without purpose. The meaning of life is intensely clear; suffering is the way of purification to illumination and to the sublime issue of eternity; the dissonance of earth melts into the harmony of heaven. The disasters of time are transformed into the triumphs of immortality; justice is resolved into love and love harmonizes into justice. Shakespeare indeed knows earth, but he does not comprehend heaven; he looks downward and inward, but not upward. Calderon comprehends earth in the illumination of heaven; he looks inward and upward, and in the glory of the celestial vision he sees the darkness of the world dissipated.

In all drama there is a prime motif of its action, the main spring of its movement, the determinative power of its conclusion. In the Greek drama we saw this to be fate. In the Greek mind fate was the insoluble mystery of human existence; it was a mystery of darkness, the unutterable word of the

abyss. Against its blind power man vainly strove. In Æschylus we saw humanity impotently pitted against it; in Sophocles the Hellenic nationality in the person of its royal dynasties struggled vainly against its might; in Euripides the individual became the victim of its sightless vengeance. If we would understand the significance of Shakespeare's tragedy, we must discover the governing motif of its action; the power that in the Shakespearean conception ruled the destinies of men; that which in Shakespearean drama corresponded to the fate of Greek tragedy. Where the Greeks conceived fate Shakespeare placed chance. The overruling power which shaped men's ends in Shakespearean tragedy was chance, and chance is as blind as fate and as impersonal.* Let men rough-hew their ends as they will, it is the destiny of chance that after all shapes them. It is this view of human existence that darkens the Shakespearean prospect of life, glooms it in sadness and terminates it in night. Chance was Shakespeare's dramatic God and the baleful influence of his deity swallows up the

* Hello—Les Préjugés in "Les Plateaux de la Balance."

sunshine of life like some disastrous cloud in whose black bosom the deadly thunderbolt awaits its fearful victim.

In Calderon heaven is everywhere in contact with earth; the light of spirituality roseates the entire *mis-en-scene*; God, in whose sight not a sparrow falls unmarked, not a leaf drops from the rose unseen, watches with a benign love and a jealous justice over every moment of human existence. The devious pathways of life are radiant with Divine grace and mercy, and man is led onward to happiness by the solicitations of a Divine love, which gently urges the will without forcing it. The Deity who presides over the drama of Calderon is the personal God of Christianity, eternal Power and eternal Wisdom, leading man to perfection with the correspondence of the free human will by the power of grace engendered in the plenitude of the Divine love. In Calderon, as in Dante, we have the consummation of all living in the beatitude of heaven, the solution of human existence in the light of the eternal Word. They, beyond all others, are the world's Catholic poets, and transcend all others in

proportion to this sublimity of their theme. While we cannot say that Calderon's native genius excelled Shakespeare's, for in profound reflection and the understanding of human motives and a large power of imagination none has ever eclipsed the bard of Avon, it is to the Spanish dramatist that the palm must be given for the completest, fullest and sublimest conception of life and man. He gives a full and free solution where Shakespeare propounds a dark riddle; he leads us to light where Shakespeare ushers in night; he transfigures life into the glorious solution of Divine light where Shakespeare plunges to the abyss.

Whether the great influence of Shakespeare coupled, with the religious decline and the division of the unity of truth in England in his time, prepared the way for the spiritual tepidity of English literature in subsequent centuries or whether Shakespeare himself was evidence of that torpidity of faith and of a spiritual decline already begun in England, English literature has never attained the spiritual heights upon which Dante placed the literature of Italy and Calderon the

literature of Spain. Milton in a later century essayed a sublimely spiritual subject in his "Paradise Lost," but his treatment lacked the true Catholic spirit; it was preternatural rather than supernatural, and, therefore, failed in human interest. Its theme, in spite of its title, is not the fall of man so much as the rebellion of Lucifer and a latent vindication of the fallen angel, whose ruined estate the poet depicts with a secret sympathy. The work leaves a dissonance in the moral universe, and though Milton subsequently perceived its incompleteness and endeavored to redeem it by his "Paradise Regained," the latter work did not solve the discord and fell, in conception and execution, far below its predecessor. Milton, unlike Dante and Calderon, did not possess the key of the solution to the problem of evil and the Catholic illumination of the Divine Word. His hell is not the hell of sin, where the moral dissonance of the universe finds its solution in the vindication of supreme justice, but the orderly abode of spiritual powers, who have constructed its flaming palaces in defiance of the supreme might of the tyrannous power which

has thrust them out of heaven. The Miltonic heaven is material; it is Titanitic, but its proportions are not spiritual; its imagery has no vestige of symbolism. The Paradise of Dante is one vast image of light, a subtle symbolism of spiritual beatitude, as his Purgatorio is a symbolism of spiritual purification, and his Inferno the vivid symbol of spiritual loss and the vindication of eternal justice. But Milton's imagery is direct and merely literal; vastness and hugeness constitute his familiar figure of spirituality, and beyond the image lies no higher meaning; it is therefore gross and materialistic, its proportions not indeed human but preternatural. His angels both of the pit and the height are Titans, vast bulks of force, not spiritual beings whose powers are of the intellect and will.

In the contrast between Milton and Dante we may in some sort estimate the spiritual decadence of Europe by the time of the seventeenth century. Ardent faith had been succeeded by a cold formalism. The Divine science, which had clarified and illuminated the intellect of man in the middle

ages, had been abandoned and forgotten. Confusion and skepticism followed close and disastrously. In the wake of the religious division of the sixteenth century, when the Divine unity of truth was abandoned by nearly half of Europe, dissension and discord follow in the intellectual life of Europe. Philosophy fell into the hands of a brutal skepticism and was there torn to pieces. Reason became an instrument of destruction and the paralogism of Locke dethroned the intellect and destroyed certainty by reducing thought to the level of mere sensation. In France, Bayle prepared the way for the eighteenth century and Voltaire. Never in the history of Christian Europe did the stream of intellectuality run so shallowly as in the eighteenth century. A corrosive vanity devoured the intellectual life of the age and an insatiable rage of destruction seized upon it. Nothing was spared the poisoned fang of skepticism and ridicule. The very heart of life was gangrened and eaten out. The vicious quitch of doubt and denial had got into the blood of the century. Voltaire was its completest and most typical manifestation.

He was like a raging fire in the stubble, a rank poison in the system. In all the history of literature no man has ever exercised so baleful and damnable an influence. Without depth, he scattered himself abroad on all subjects; skeptical, cynical, hateful, he was possessed of the passion of destruction. His hatred was savage, satanic. Vivacious and acute, flashing into a superficial brilliancy he bent all his energies to the one end of destroying religion in the human heart. He made it his mission to canker and destroy. And Voltaire was his age; the incarnation of all its intellectual vices. It was the age of fustian and rhetoric, tinsel and vanity. Its skepticism led it into formalism, because its skepticism had devoured the substance of its life, and it could live only externally. It denied the supernatural in men's lives and lost as well all conception of the natural. It denied God and forgot nature in the denial. It made an immense show of love of nature and elaborated pastorals in the laces and furbelows of courts. It neither loved God nor nature; it loved itself alone and its sole cultus was vanity. It begot Diderot and the

encyclopedia and imagined that it was scientific. It gathered data and information with immense assiduity ; but it had no conception of unity, and there can be no science without unity. The encyclopedia of the eighteenth century was the very disintegration of science ; it dismembered science, scattered and dispersed it, and has left an inheritance of discord and specialties to the nineteenth century, from whose tangled labyrinth we have unfortunately not liberated ourselves. It was an age of quackery and unbelief. It questioned not any particular doctrine, but questioned belief itself ; it denied the power of faith, reduced it to chimeras and sought to make doubt the very heart of truth. After it had withered the soul and seered the heart like dead leaves blasted by winter, dried up the fountains of all reverence, faith and love, it burned itself up in the lurid conflagration of the French revolution. It had prepared its own malebolge and was consumed in it.

As a part of its infection there appeared towards the end of the century an immense sentimentalism in the literature of Europe. Goethe's "Sorrows of Werther" ushered in

the doleful folly and the passion of unhappiness spread like a swift contagion. It was indeed a logical manifestation of the disease of the times. Skepticism had left only the shell of life. Faith, hope, love, reverence had been ridiculed out of the heart. Goethe, then a young man, was possessed of the unquiet and despairing spirit of the times, and overcharged with the sensuous sentimentalism that infected the air about him, he uttered it in what has been called "Wertherism," an unclean spirit of sensuality and despair. The contagion spread and in England manifested itself in Byronic cynicism. It was a picture of a world gone amiss, life drained to the leas; desire consuming itself in its own flames, satiety begetting disgust and disgust hatred. In Shelly it shrieked defiance to man and heaven. It was the monstrous result of unfaith in an exhausted world. It railed against human and Divine institutions, and by the road of anarchy pleaded for an ultimate goal of reconstructed humanity. Goethe himself in some measure outgrew it, though he never shook off his affinity for it. He passed beyond it, but not

to the truth; he sought refuge from its deadly effects, not in the illumination of the Divine Word, which his genius might have attained if he had not voluntarily shut his eyes to the light, but in the absolutism of a stupendous egotism, that saw himself the center of all things and constituted himself his own God. He made a religion of his own, and that religion was self-worship.* Neither skeptical nor a scoffer he loved Voltaire, the skeptic and the scoffer incarnate. The spiritual affinity between these men would seem strange, if we did not discover a common bond between them; both hated Christianity. The French scoffer hated Christianity with all the shallow rage of a professed skeptic who hated out of sheer hate; the German absolutist hated Christianity with all the intense pride of the sensual egotist who could brook neither the humility nor the chastity of the Divine Exemplar of the Christian life. The affinity of Goethe for Voltaire sprung out of their common hate for the Word Incarnate.

"Wertherism" and Goethe introduce us to the nineteenth century, a century of *isms*, a

*Cf. Hello—Goethe in "Les Plateaux de la Balance."

melange of opinions crying volubly for recognition, a dust of theories and creeds in a whirlwind of storm. "Wertherism" had its day; but sentimentalism, the void which skepticism had made in the human heart, could not satisfy the hungered soul; doubt and despair were no sustenance for the spiritual life of man. Distracted by the division of the unity of truth which the crime of the sixteenth century has thrust upon the modern world, the nineteenth century has not looked in the right direction for the Divine remedy to its spiritual hurts. Turning from "Wertherism" in sheer disgust and the vague speculation of the transcendental absolutism in which German philosophy had darkened the universe, the nineteenth century plunged into the lower world of physics and reveled in facts, things tangible to the senses. Here at least were visible data, facts, not fancies, things that could be measured, weighed and labeled. Here at last was a solid footing for the jaded intellect. It was no cloud-land haunted by mysterious shapes of sentiment or the ghosts of speculation. The firm foot trod upon solid matter and the century gave

itself up to atoms, molecules; buried itself in the laboratory and studied nature and man in retorts and crucibles, studied but found not; and in this last decade of the dying century it finds its *terra firma* dissolving under its very feet into the old abyss of mystery and the ancient enigma as hard to understand and explain as in the days of the Pharaohs. Not in the dust of the earth is written the answer to the human cry for light. That answer reverberates only from the heavens in the Divine Word to which a hardened generation has turned a deaf ear.

Inevitable was the recoil from the barren labors of physical science, barren in spiritualities, offering stones to the hungry lips of a humanity starving for bread, the Divine Bread of Eternal Life. The age has awakened to a realization of a great desire; it is vague, indefinite; it knows not what. It has tried all things around about it, all things human and finite and is not satisfied. Hear Carlyle voicing it with Berseker rage, roaring like a Titan against the untruth, the sham and the fraud of the century, the fraud of unbelief, the self-deceit, the profound delusion which

would erect lightning rods against spiritual thunderbolts. Yet see in Carlyle himself the chief failure of his times. He cries out perpetually for faith; he clamors for the necessity of belief; but nowhere does he point out an object of belief, and it is a definite object, something to believe in with its whole heart and soul that the age pants after. He forever prates about the eternal verities and the human need of conforming to them, but never once does he tell us what the Eternal Verity is. How may we find it, and know it when we find it? The Carlylean abyss is silent when the one and only question of salvation is asked. Hear Amiel purling his plaint of unfaith in academic softness.* He sends up his sigh, morning and evening, for something in which to center his faith; he feebly believes in an indefinite vagueness somewhere, but intangible; he would believe, he avers, in some definite, tangible object if it could only be made visible to him. Yet the cross was lifted up on Calvary eighteen hundred years ago and Christ crucified, in

*Amiel's Journal, translated by Mrs. Humphrey Ward. There could be no better reflex of the weak and restless unbelief of the nineteenth century than Amiel's bewildered mind.

whom the great Apostle of the Gentiles centered his whole faith, stretches forth his arms drawing all things unto him. The Divine light has shone forth on the mountain for two thousand years, irradiating the souls and minds of men, and yet in the literature of the nineteenth century we hear a voice of darkness, a cry for light in the midst of the full blaze of the splendor of the truth, the Eternal Truth made manifest in the Incarnate Word. How lamentable in the modern world is that division of the unity of truth which the baleful influence of the sixteenth century has left as its discordant inheritance!

The literature of the day overflows with the manifestation of a passionate desire for it knows not what. It is an uncentered faith, vague, formless. In Carlyle it groaned and roared with volcanic energy, but its object was no better defined in his thunder than in the soft fluting of Amiel. Its froth and its fume bubble in multitudinous fiction, and it rustles in the indefinite pages of innumerable magazines. It pipes everywhere in verse and rhapsodies in prose; it is at one moment a soft aestheticism and the next a burning

humanitarianism. It ranges earth and sky, sea and land, searches everywhere for a fixed object of its passion, looks everywhere—save at the cross on Calvary. No false light flashes on the horizon but it rushes to it in eager expectation, yet never sees the great Light on the mountain which has been burning there with a Divine splendor for two thousand years. But though it be blind, it has at least profited over the preceding century by awaking to the realization of the desire of faith in the heart of humanity. The eighteenth century lived on the bagatelles of a scoffing skepticism; the nineteenth has realized the need of belief, though it has not learned how to formulate it. It hungers and thirsts not indeed after justice, for he alone possesses justice who knows truth, but after something which was lost in the wilderness of doubt, through which it wandered for a hundred years, something to fill the void which the age of Voltaire left in the famished soul. It cries aloud for that something; it cannot articulate it in speech; for it has forgotten the power of the Divine Word, which alone bestows the gift of spiritual language. Tennyson fitly describes the

century's need when he compared the man of the nineteenth century to—

> "An infant crying in the night,
> An infant crying for the light,
> And with no language but a cry."

It is in truth an age of darkness sending forth its wail for light. But when and how will the Light come? When the heart of humanity is made pure, for the pure in heart shall see God. And the Light will be made manifest from the mountain heights, where it has burned undimmed even amidst generations of the blind. Faith is the hunger of the human heart, faith in God its only appeasement; faith in the Incarnate Word its only salvation. The illumination of that Divine Word in the human intellect will alone bring light. Faith in Christ and in Him crucified is the great need of the human heart; the philosophy of the Incarnation, the great need of the human intellect. That heart and that intellect slept in the eighteenth century; it has awakened in the nineteenth and is still bewildered by the fantasies of its dreams. But in the fact of the awakening there is hope, and when the mist and the vapor which still

steam upward from that valley of death in the century gone by, shall have rolled their dun clouds away and the vision cleared, the generations to come will see the undimmed splendor of the light on the mountain, and man once again abide in the unity of truth under its Divine Illumination.